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epic ILLUSTRATED™

this issue:

COBALT 60
by Vaughn Bodé
Mark Bodé
& Larry Todd

and

THE LAST
GALACTUS STORY

plus

RELIC
by Al Williamson

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©1982

DUET

"IT WASN'T SO BAD, REALLY, BEING CONQUERED BY THE ALIENS. I MEAN, THEY WERE PRETTY DECENT ABOUT THE WHOLE THING, WHEN YOU STOP TO THINK ABOUT IT.
"LIKE, WHEN THEY WERE GOING TO BLOW UP VENUS. TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR POWER. PEOPLE PROTESTED AND SAID HOW MUCH VENUS MEANS TO US AND EVERYTHING AND THEY LISTENED... THEY REALLY LISTENED. THEY WERE WILLING TO COMPROMISE.
SAVE THE PLANET OF LOVE
SAVE OUR MORNING STAR!
VENUS COMPROMISE
"SO THEY BLEW UP MARS INSTEAD, WHICH WAS JUST A DEAD HUNK OF ROCK ANYWAY. AND SOME PEOPLE BITCHED ABOUT THAT, TOO. SOME PEOPLE ARE NEVER SATISIFIED.

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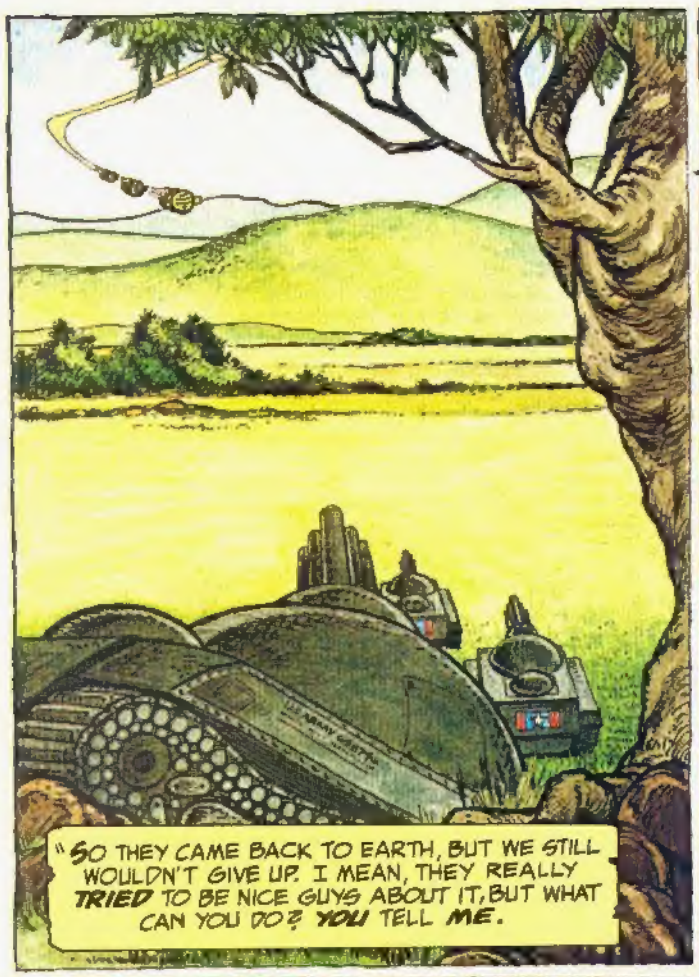

"SO THEY CAME BACK TO EARTH, BUT WE STILL WOULDN'T GIVE UP. I MEAN, THEY REALLY *TRIED* TO BE NICE GUYS ABOUT IT, BUT WHAT CAN YOU DO? *YOU* TELL *ME*.

"WE HIT THEM WITH EVERYTHING WE HAD, BUT IT DIDN'T DO ANY GOOD. IT WAS LIKE OUT OF *WAR OF THE WORLDS*, YOU KNOW? THEY DIDN'T BAT AN EYE.

"WE COULD'VE SAVED A LOT OF MONEY IF SOMEBODY LIKE THE PRESIDENT HAD JUST SEEN THAT MOVIE. EVEN THE NUKES DIDN'T DO ANY GOOD. I DON'T THINK ANYBODY REALLY EXPECTED THEM TO, BUT I SUPPOSE WE HAD TO GIVE IT OUR BEST SHOT.

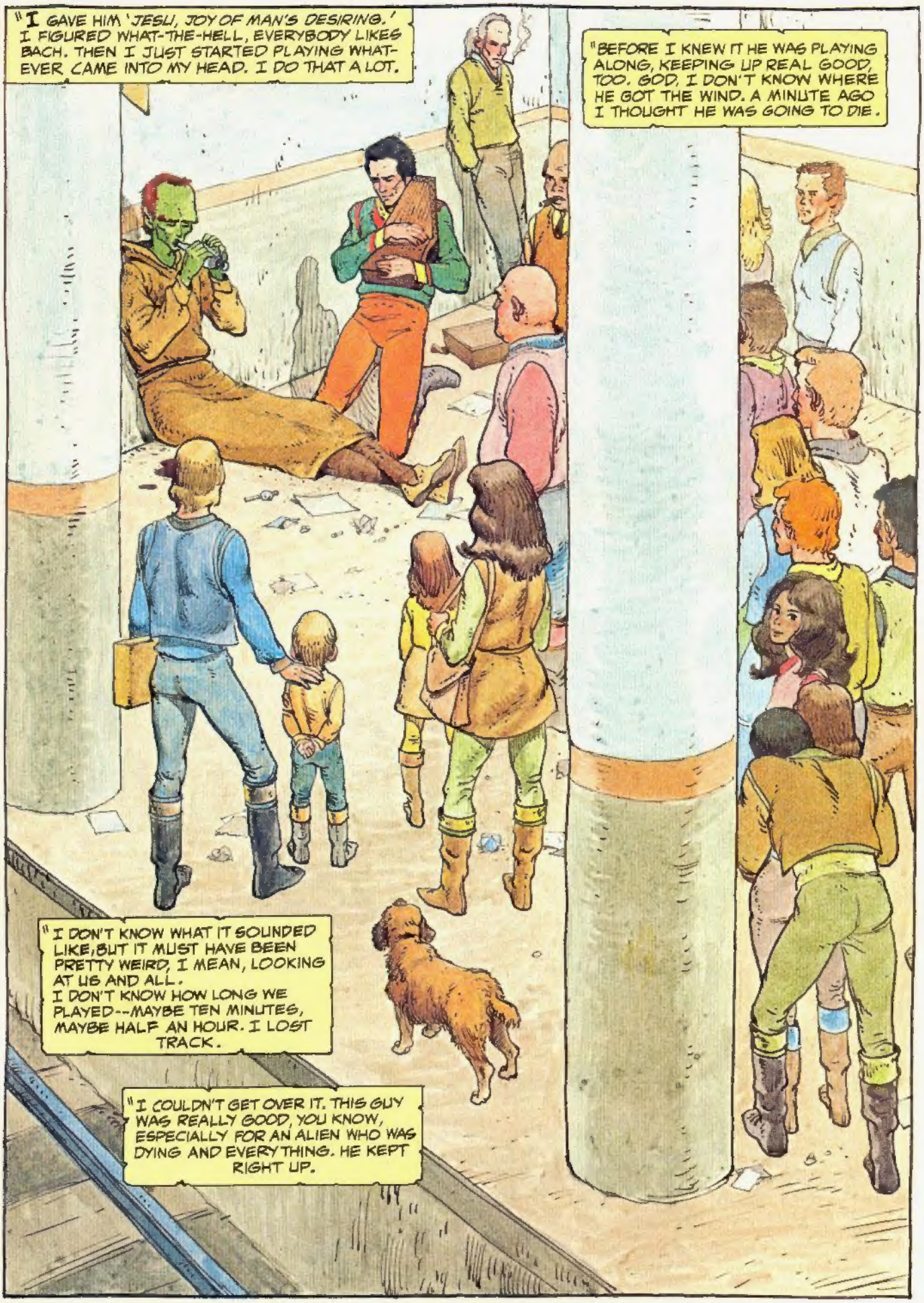
"I DON'T KNOW IF THEY EVEN FIRED A SHOT... THE ALIENS, I MEAN. SEEMS LIKE WE DID ALL THE BLOWING STUFF UP. THEY MADE US GET RID OF ALL OUR NUCLEAR WEAPONS FIRST THING WHEN WE SIGNED THE PEACE TREATY.

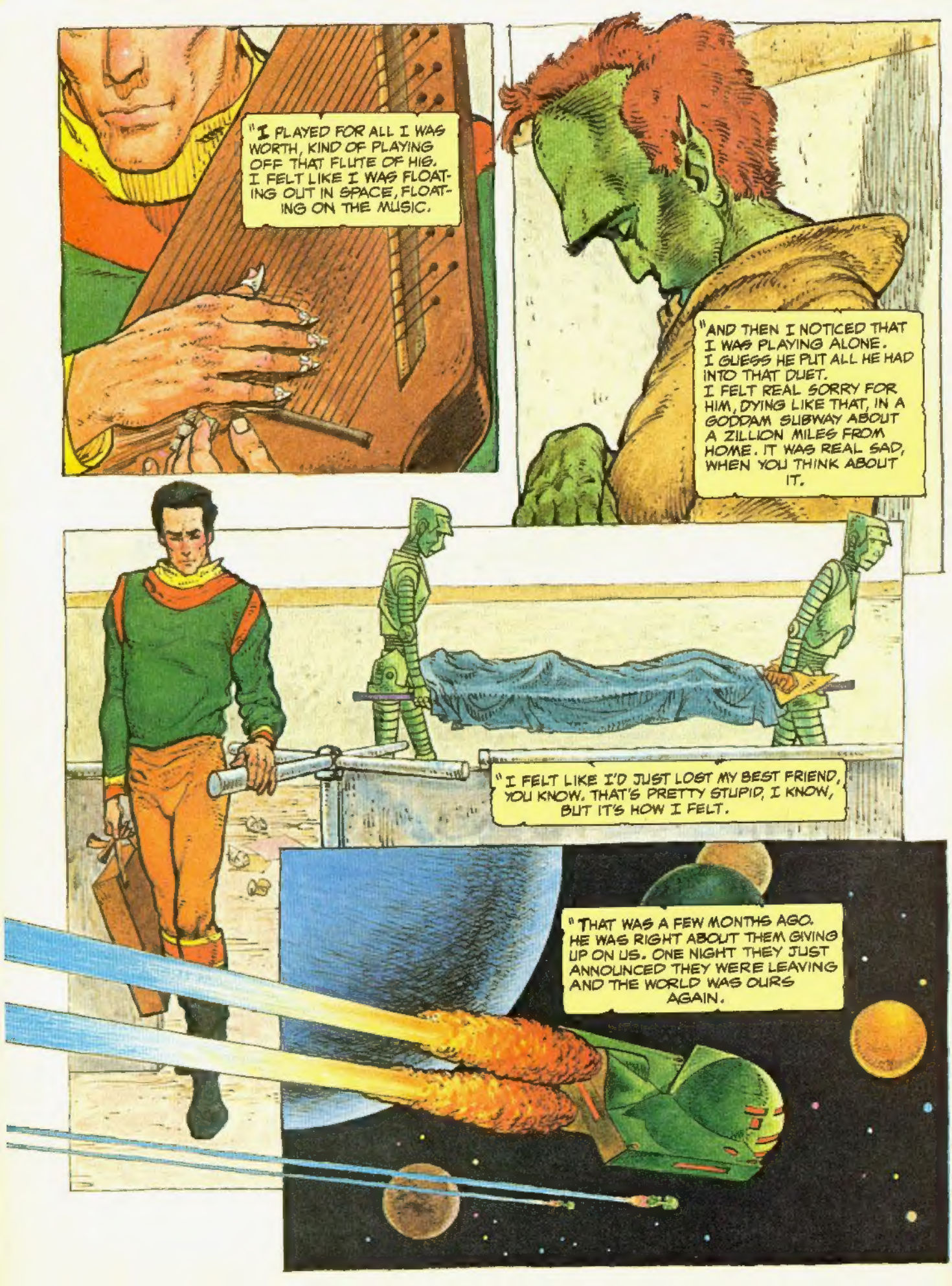
"EVERYBODY SIGNED BUT THE ARABS AND SUCH, AND FINALLY THE ALIENS HAD TO DO SOMETHING DRASTIC. THE MIDDLE EAST WAS CALLED 'THE GREAT PIT' AFTER THAT, BUT EVERYTHING ELSE STAYED PRETTY MUCH THE SAME.
"THE GOVERNMENTS WERE STILL THE SAME, THE ECONOMIC SYSTEM... THERE WAS STILL THE SAME OLD CRAP ON TELEVISION. THE ALIENS HAD THE LAST WORD ON EVERYTHING BUT THEY DIDN'T REALLY MESS IN OUR PERSONAL BUSINESS MUCH, NOT ENOUGH TO DO ANY GOOD.
"WE STILL HAD CRIME AND POVERTY AND ALL THAT, JUST LIKE THE OLD DAYS. IT WAS STILL TOUGH TO MAKE A LIVING PLAYING THE AUTOHARP. SOME THINGS'LL NEVER CHANGE.
"I DIDN'T HATE THE ALIENS. THEY NEVER DID ANYTHING TO ME. I WAS KIND OF GLAD WE *DIDN'T* HAVE THE NUKES ANYMORE, TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH. SAVED A LOT OF WORRY, YOU KNOW?
"THAT'S WHY IT BURNED ME TO SEE THEM BEATING ON THE ALIEN IN THE SUBWAY. HE WAS MINDING HIS OWN BUSINESS AND EVERYTHING, SO WHY'D THEY HAVE TO DO THAT? PEOPLE CAN BE REAL CREEPY SOMETIMES.

"THEY RAN OFF, AND I JUST FOLLOWED AN IMPULSE TO RUN UP AND SEE IF THERE WAS ANYTHING I COULD DO. I DO THAT A LOT... FOLLOW MY IMPULSES, I MEAN.
"I COULD SEE HE WAS IN TROUBLE. THEIR SHIPS CAN TAKE IT BUT, BOY, THE ALIENS THEMSELVES WEREN'T SO TOUGH. I THOUGHT AGAIN, THAT IT WAS JUST LIKE THE MOVIE.
"I HELPED HIM SIT UP SINCE THAT'S WHAT HE SEEMED TO WANT TO DO. HE WAS SAYING SOMETHING BUT I COULDN'T HEAR WHAT IT WAS, SO I LEANED IN REAL CLOSE.
DON'T... GO. PLEASE...
"I JUST SAT THERE FOR AWHILE AND HE SEEMED TO GET STRONGER, BUT STILL WASN'T IN ANY GREAT SHAPE, IF YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN. PRETTY SOON HE STARTED TALKING AGAIN.

"HE TALKED REAL DULL, YOU KNOW, LIKE MAYBE HE WAS FEVERISH OR SOMETHING, RUNNING HIS WORDS ALL TOGETHER SO IT GAVE ME LIKE A HEADACHE TO LISTEN TO HIM. BUT I COULDN'T HELP IT. I GUESS I WAS FASCINATED OR SOMETHING.
"HE TOLD ME HOW THEY ONLY CONQUERED THE EARTH TO SAVE US FROM OURSELVES, AND WHAT A BIG MISTAKE THE WHOLE THING WAS. THE EARTH WAS TOO FAR FROM HIS HOME PLANET... THEIR SUPPLIES RAN SHORT... THEY BARELY HAD ENOUGH ENERGY TO BLOW UP MARS BY THE TIME THEY GOT HERE.
"A LOT OF THE HIGH MUCKY-MUCKS WANTED TO DROP THE WHOLE THING, BUT WE WERE A HIGH PRIORITY CASE ON ACCOUNT OF OUR NUCLEAR WEAPONS. HE SAID HE DIDN'T THINK THEY'D STAY MUCH LONGER. IT COST TOO MUCH.
"HE SAID HE DIDN'T EVEN WANT TO COME HERE IN THE FIRST PLACE, BUT HE WAS DRAFTED LIKE. HE SAID HE WASN'T CUT OUT FOR THIS KIND OF LIFE, ALL THE DISCIPLINE AND HARDSHIP AND EVERYTHING.

"I ASKED HIM WHAT HE DID BACK HOME AND HE SAID HE'D SHOW ME AND, BOY, WAS I SORRY. I THOUGHT IT WAS GOING TO KILL HIM, JUST REACHING UNDER HIS COAT LIKE THAT. BUT HE WANTED TO DO IT.
"I ABOUT DIED WHEN HE SAID HE WAS A MUSICIAN. I MEAN, THAT PUT US ON COMMON GROUND RIGHT AWAY.
"IT WASN'T MUCH, REALLY, SOME KIND OF FLUTE. IT WASN'T LIKE A REAL INSTRUMENT... MORE LIKE A HARMONICA OR SOMETHING. SOMETHING YOU COULD CARRY AROUND WITH YOU.
"I SHOWED HIM MY HARP AND HE SEEMED REAL AMAZED, LIKE IT WAS A MIRACLE OR SOME-THING A SAVAGE LIKE ME COULD PLAY SOME-THING LIKE THAT.
"I SHOULD'VE KNOWN HE'D ASK FOR A TUNE.

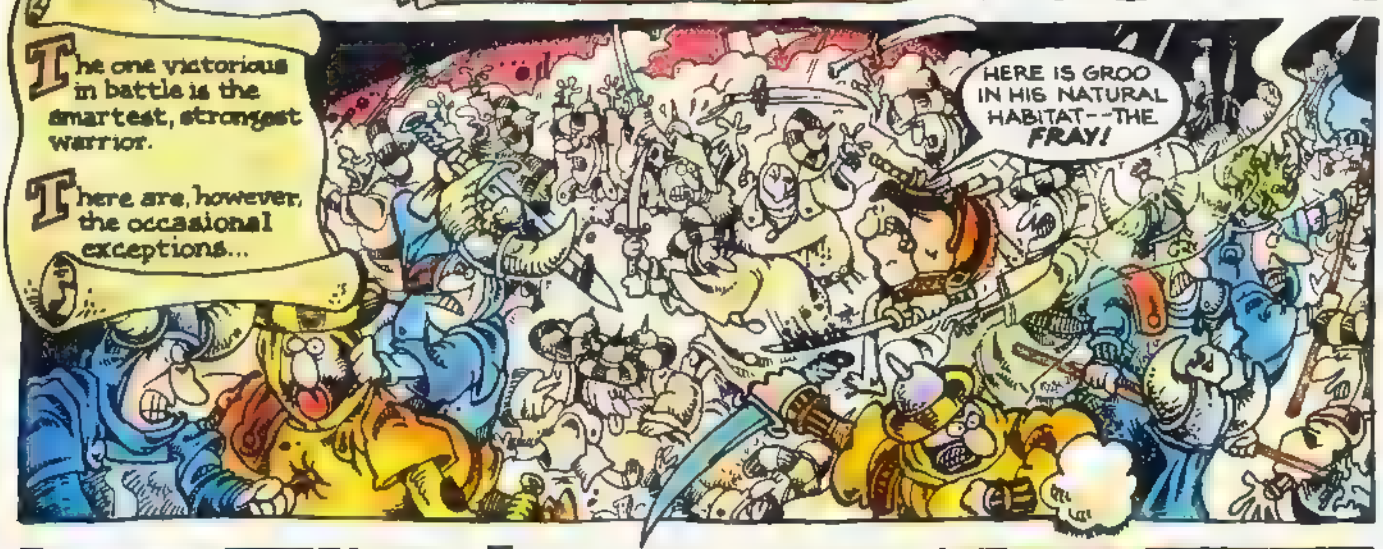

"I GAVE HIM 'JESU, JOY OF MAN'S DESIRING.' I FIGURED WHAT-THE-HELL, EVERYBODY LIKES BACH. THEN I JUST STARTED PLAYING WHATEVER CAME INTO MY HEAD. I DO THAT A LOT.
"BEFORE I KNEW IT HE WAS PLAYING ALONG, KEEPING UP REAL GOOD, TOO. GOD, I DON'T KNOW WHERE HE GOT THE WIND. A MINUTE AGO I THOUGHT HE WAS GOING TO DIE.
"I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT SOUNDED LIKE, BUT IT MUST HAVE BEEN PRETTY WEIRD, I MEAN, LOOKING AT US AND ALL. I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG WE PLAYED--MAYBE TEN MINUTES, MAYBE HALF AN HOUR. I LOST TRACK.
"I COULDN'T GET OVER IT. THIS GUY WAS REALLY GOOD, YOU KNOW, ESPECIALLY FOR AN ALIEN WHO WAS DYING AND EVERYTHING. HE KEPT RIGHT UP.


"I PLAYED FOR ALL I WAS WORTH, KIND OF PLAYING OFF THAT FLUTE OF HIS. I FELT LIKE I WAS FLOATING OUT IN SPACE, FLOATING ON THE MUSIC.
"AND THEN I NOTICED THAT I WAS PLAYING ALONE. I GUESS HE PUT ALL HE HAD INTO THAT DUET. I FELT REAL SORRY FOR HIM, DYING LIKE THAT, IN A GODDAM SUBWAY ABOUT A ZILLION MILES FROM HOME. IT WAS REAL SAD, WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT IT.
"I FELT LIKE I'D JUST LOST MY BEST FRIEND, YOU KNOW. THAT'S PRETTY STUPID, I KNOW, BUT IT'S HOW I FELT.
"THAT WAS A FEW MONTHS AGO. HE WAS RIGHT ABOUT THEM GIVING UP ON US. ONE NIGHT THEY JUST ANNOUNCED THEY WERE LEAVING AND THE WORLD WAS OURS AGAIN.

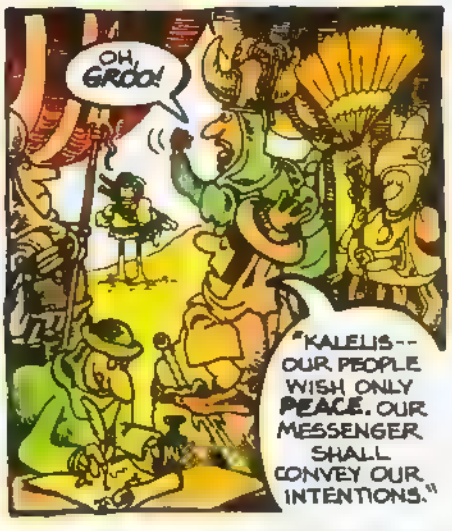
"NOW I'M IN THE ALIEN'S SHOES. NOT LITERALLY, YOU UNDERSTAND, BUT I MEAN I GOT DRAFTED. YEAH, ME. WHO'D HAVE THOUGHT IT?
"ANYHOW, THEY'RE SHIPPING US OUT TO THE GREAT PIT TO FIGHT THE RUSSIANS OVER OIL RIGHTS. I DON'T KNOW WHY WE HAVE TO DO IT. I'VE GOT NOTHING AGAINST ANY RUSSIAN WHO'S EVER BEEN BORN.
"WHY DO PEOPLE PUT UP WITH THIS CRAP? I'LL GO, BUT I'M GOING PREPARED, EVEN IF THEY WON'T LET ME TAKE MY HARP.
"I'M NOT TOO SHABBY ON THIS ALIEN TOOTER. AND WHO KNOWS... LATE AT NIGHT, OFF IN SOME DARK CORNER, I MAY RUN ACROSS SOME RUSSIAN WITH A BALALAIKA OR SOMETHING WHO WANTS TO PLAY A DUET...."

SERGIO ARAGONÉS GROO THE WANDERER

BY SERGIO ARAGONÉS
LETTERS STAN SAKAI
COLORS TOM LUTH
VERBALIST MARK EVANIER


The one victorious in battle is the smartest, strongest warrior.
There are, however, the occasional exceptions...
HERE IS GROO IN HIS NATURAL HABITAT--THE FRAY!

WITH THE MERCOS ANNIHILATED, WE HAVE BUT TO SETTLE WARS WITH THE KALELI TRIBE! WE WILL SEND A MESSENGER WITH A MESSAGE OF PEACE!
WHO IS TOTALLY EXPENDABLE?



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In no time at all, he was lost...
And more lost...
TAKE YON ROAD, MY SON!
IDIOT.
Many nights passed.
CREAK.
HA! GROO DOES WHAT GROO DOES BEST!
WAIT! BEFORE YOU DIE! WHERE IS THE KALELI VILLAGE?
UGG... UGG...
HE POINTED THAT WAY!
THANK YOU.
CROAK!
For weeks, he walked...
THIS ROAD CERTAINLY SEEMS FAMILIAR..
FOOL.
Groo asked and asked.
WHY IS HE LOST?
HE MUST BE STUPID!
I KNOW NOT WHERE THEY LIVE.
Until finally
SUCCESS!
IN THE VALLEY OF THE FIFTH MOUNTAIN!
YOU CANNOT MISS IT!
I HAVE NOT EATEN SINCE MY LAST MEAL! I MUST HAVE FOOD!
IS THAT THE SOUND OF FOOD?
CHIRK! CHIRK!
AH... PREY!

HAIIIYA!
THWACK!
APPETIZER!
ENTREE'!
SLICE!
HEY, DESSERT! COME BACK HERE!
CHIRK! CHIRK!
TWO OUT OF THREE IS NOT BAD! NOW, I SHALL BUILD A FLAME AND FRICASEE THEM!
CHOMP!
BITE!
GULP!
SWALLOW!
SALIVATE!
YUM!
NOT AS GOOD AS CHEESE DIP BUT TASTY, NONETHELESS!
BURP!
NOW! THE LAND OF THE KALELIS SHOULD BE JUST OVER THIS HILL...
WAIT! MORE OF THOSE TASTY CREATURES!
CHIRK! CHIRK! CHIRK!
THE KALELIS MUST RAISE THOSE BEASTS FOR FOOD! I WILL DINE WELL...
CHIRK!
CHIRK!
CHIRK!
CHIRK!
CHIRK!
CHIRK!

CHIRK! CHIRK!
CHIRK!
SLAY THE FILTHY CANNIBAL WHO ATE HYOO! AND LYOO!
CHIRK!!
CHIRK?
CHIRK CHIRK!
WHY DO I HAVE THE FEELING THAT MY MESSAGE OF PEACE WILL NOT GO OVER BIG?
CHIRK CHIRK CHIRK!
CHIRK!
CHIRK CHIRK CHIRK CHIRK!
CHIRK?
CHIRK!
CHIRK CHIRK!
THE END
ARAGONÉS

WITH THE TURN OF THE GREAT, NEW CENTURY, THE SUPER POWERS WERE STILL STALEMATED. QUARRELS BETWEEN SMALLER COUNTRIES WERE SQUELCHED BY THE MANIPULATIONS OF LARGE CORPORATIONS WHICH HAD BECOME RIVALING SUPER POWERS THEMSELVES: **M.DONNEL**, THE FAST FOOD KING WHICH LITERALLY CONTROLLED THE WORLD'S FOOD SUPPLY; **C.V.**, THE FRENCH ENERGY GIANT WITH A STEEL GRIP ON AFRICA AND ALL OF FREE EUROPE; **N.T.A.**, THE SAUDI-ARABIAN CONGLOM WHICH WAS VIRTUALLY THE EARTH'S REALTOR; AND **SON-E**, THE JAPANESE ENGINEERING MONSTER THAT MADE EVERYTHING FROM DIGITAL WATCHES TO SPACE SHUTTLES. THESE CORPORATIONS BEGAN CLASHING FOR CONTROL OF EVERY OTHER KNOWN INDUSTRY. IN THIS CLASH FOR TOTAL POWER A NEW PLANE WAS FORMED TO WAGE WAR.

AND BLOODY WARS THEY WERE.

CORPORATE WARS

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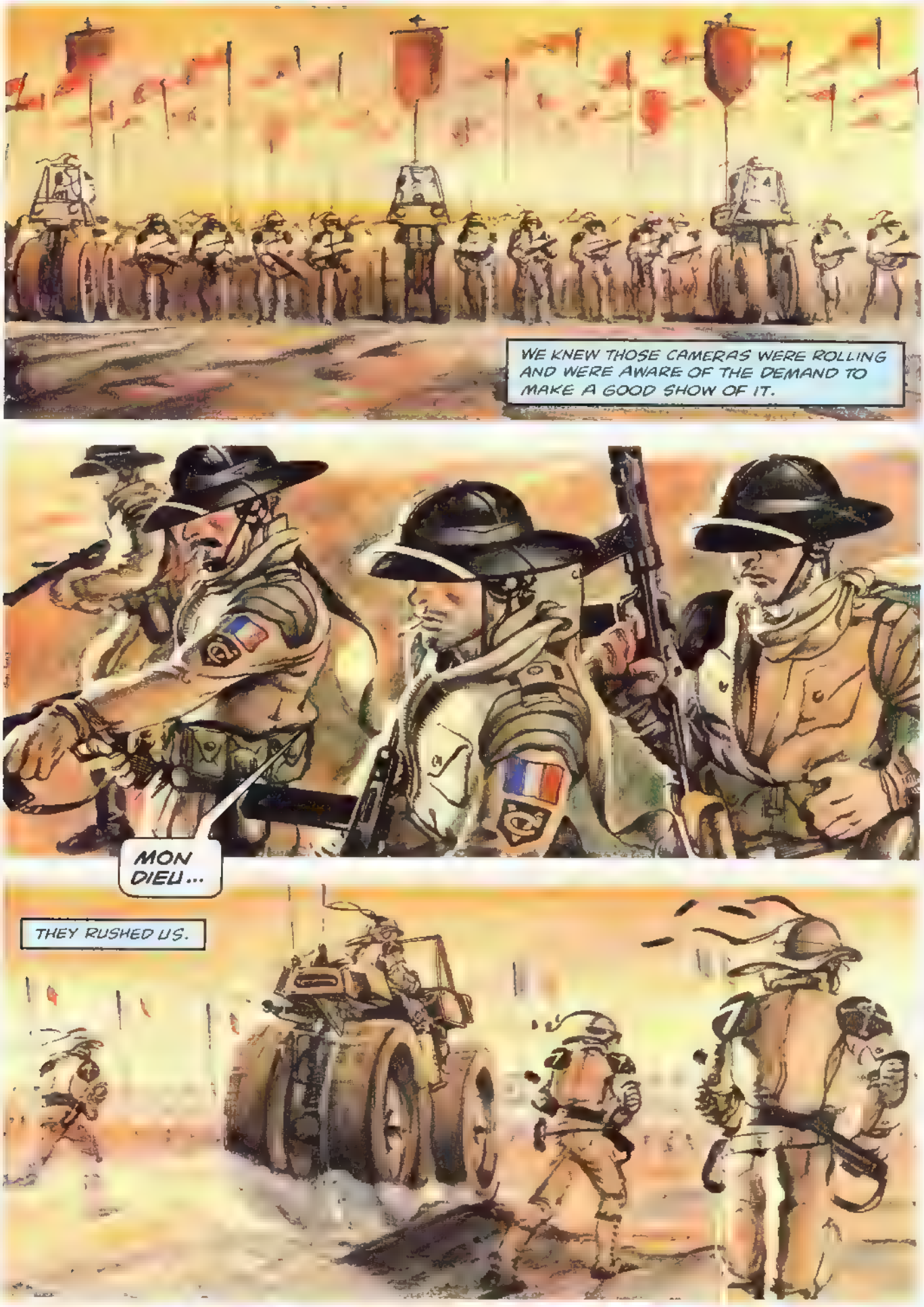

WE KNEW THOSE CAMERAS WERE ROLLING AND WERE AWARE OF THE DEMAND TO MAKE A GOOD SHOW OF IT.
MON DIEU...
THEY RUSHED US.

THEIR INITIAL PUSH BROKE OUR FORMATION, BUT THEY SOON FELL BENEATH THE RAPID FIRE OF OUR GRAPHITE SHERWYN 60s.
PIGS!
SALUT! SALUT!
AFTER THOSE FIRST CLIPS WERE SPENT AND THE SABERS AND PISTOLS WERE DRAWN ...
... THINGS REALLY GOT UGLY.

THE BLOODSHED BECAME FAR TOO EXCESSIVE, EVEN BY TELECOM STANDARDS. THE CAMERA UNITS BUGGED OUT AND THE EMERGENCY VEHICLES DROPPED DOWN.

THE LAST BATTLE OF THE SERIES WAS OVER. M.DONNEL HAD LOST TO C.V. MIRACULOUSLY, I HAD SURVIVED IT. MY CONTRACT WITH C.V. WAS MET OUT AND I WAS GLAD . WITH GOOD REASON.

NOW MAYBE THE WORLD AND MY LITTLE CORNER OF IT WOULD GET SOME DECENT FOOD.
THE HANDFUL OF SURVIVORS, MYSELF INCLUDED, WERE INSTANT TELECOM HEROES. FOR THAT REASON, I DIDN'T SMILE, WAVE, OR EVEN LOOK AT THE CAMERA.
BOB, THOSE ARE THE FACES OF VICTORY... YES SIR!
MY WIFE WAS WATCHING.
THAT... THAT... WORM!

ALL THIS TIME! HE LIED, TOLD ME HE WAS WORKING WITH HIS BROTHER... AT TELECOM!
...STAY TUNED FOR THE WILD, MADCAP SEX ADVENTURES OF MISSYMEG!
MY WIFE: SMART GIRL. BUT LACKING MOTIVATION, SHE NEVER QUITE REALIZED HER POTENTIAL. SHELTERED, PAMPERED, LAZY, SHE WAS CONTENT WITH SITTING HOME, WATCHING TELECOM. AND EATING JUNK FOOD. SHE WAS WHOLLY AMERICAN.
RIGHT

SHE COULDN'T SHARE OR UNDERSTAND MY RADICAL IDEALOGICAL VIEWS, NOR MY YEARNING FOR EXCITEMENT AND ADVENTURE.

SHE LOATHED CHANGE.
DAMN!
I IMAGINED HER FACING THE ENEMY, THAT DARK, DISMAL OVEN; SEEING HERSELF LEARNING HOW TO USE IT AMIDST A MIASMA OF COOK BOOKS, FLOURED BAKE TINS, AND MOUNTAINS OF UNWASHED COOKERY.
NET WT. 10 OZ
OPEN
PEAS
CAN B2
THE CONTEMPLATION OF IT PROPELLING HER INTO AN ABSOLUTE MAELSTROM OF ANXIETY.

SHE KNEW WHAT C.V.'S VICTORY MEANT. M. DONNEL GOING UNDER IN THE FOOD EXCHANGE.
M. DONNEL'S FOOD WAS PROMOTED AND SOLD TO THE MASSES BY TELECOM. 99% OF ALL CONSUMER GOODS WERE SOLD THIS WAY. THE ADS FLASHED, YOU SELECTED BY GRID, AND THE CREDIT WAS TAKEN FROM YOUR TELECOM ACCOUNT.
HEAT

TELECOM RAPED MY WIFE'S MIND **DAILY** AND SHE LOVED IT. SHE WAS PART OF THIS LOVE TRIANGLE - SHE LOVED TELECOM; SHE **ALSO** LOVED M. DONNEL. M. DONNEL LOVED TELECOM AND TELECOM LOVED M. DONNEL BACK. TOGETHER, TELECOM AND M. DONNEL COULDN'T GIVE A FUCK ABOUT **HER**.

C.V.'S INTENTION WAS TO BLAST M. DONNEL RIGHT OUT OF THE WATER, TO SELL FOOD WITH MORE **SUBSTANCE**, LESS PRE-PREPARATION, LESS **HYPE**. C.V. WAS GOING TO SELL FOOD PRODUCTS TO THE **ELITE** DIRECTLY THROUGH TELECOM AND CURTAIL M. DONNEL'S COZY LITTLE MONOPOLY.

C.V.'S POLICY MAINTAINED THAT THE WORLD POPULATION BE **RE-EDUCATED** IN HOME FOOD PREPARATION, FORCING A RETURN TO **CLASSICAL CUISINE**.

C.V. WAS GOING TO FORCE MY WIFE TO COOK.

I WONDER WHAT'S FOR DINNER?

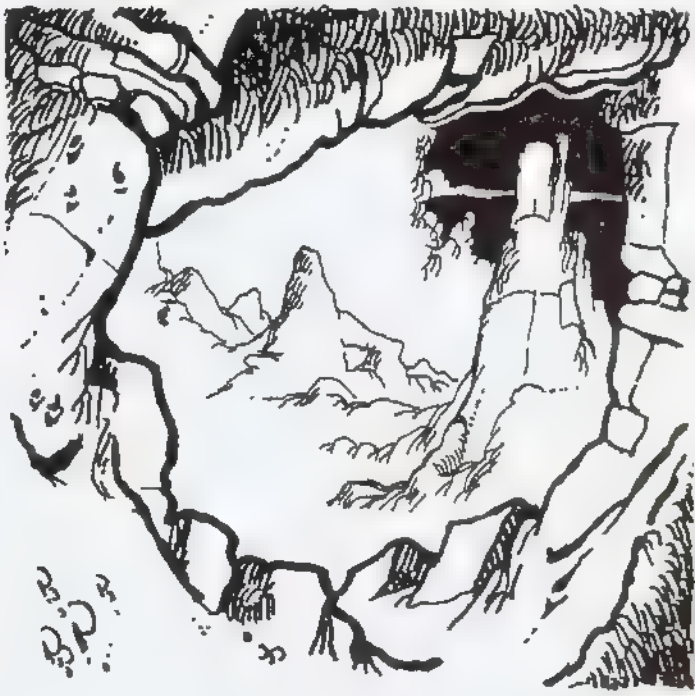
THE DOOR EXPLODED OPEN BEFORE MY KEY COULD EVEN TOUCH THE LOCK.

I HOPE YOU'RE SATISFIED!

OVER DINNER WE WATCHED, IN HEAVY SILENCE, THE REPLAYS OF THE CONFRONTATION. THEY WERE INTERCUT WITH SPOTS FROM BOTH C.V. AND M. DONNEL.
TRY NEW FRAN-CHOOSIES! A TASTE OF GAY PARIS ... OUI!
M. DONNEL'S HAS A DINNER THAT'S JUST FAB! IT'S FAB, IT'S FAB, IT'S = DUM-DA-DUM = PRE-FAB!
...I WAS ELATED. I HAD FOUGHT FOR SOMETHING I BELIEVED IN AND COULD SEE THE FRUIT OF MY LABOR FLASHING ON THE SCREEN.
--GOURMET STYLE DISHES FROM M. DONNEL! THE TASTE SENSATION THAT'S SWEEPING THE N--
--CREPÉ SUZETTE, COQ AU VIN! YOU, TOO, WILL SAY: VIVE LA FRANCE!
THE C.V. FOOD SPOTS MADE MY MOUTH WATER. I COULDN'T WAIT UNTIL THE OPTION CAME UP ON MY TELECOM GRID..
SOON I WOULD TOUCH THEM..
...TASTE THEM!
SOON I COULD FORGET SOY-BASED M. DONNEL CRAP AND SWITCH TO SOMETHING FAR SUPERIOR. C.V. KELP PROTEINS! LIFE WAS GOOD

IN THE LATE AFTERNOON, A LIGHT BREEZE COMES DOWN OVER THE HIGH MOUNTAINS AND ENDLESS CANYONS.. THE BREEZE HISSES THE SAND OVER GREAT, WIND ERODED ROCKS AND DUMPS IT LIKE FRAIL DREAMS AND SAD WHISPERS OVER AGES OLD TIRED FORMATIONS OF STONE... IT IS A QUITE, DEATHLESS, TIMELESS WORLD..... IT IS, OUR FUTURE.....

YOU KNOW, WE SPECULATE., WE TRY TO OUTGUESS THE UNPREDICTABLE WHIMS OF NATURE AND WE ARE SELDOM RIGHT.. BUT, WE CAN GUESS WITH UNERRING ACCURACY, THE FUTURE OF HOMO SAPIENS. THAT CREATURE MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD HIMSELF!.. MAN, IS THE GREAT DESTROYER, THE INSATIABLE TAKER.. MAN, WILL BLOW HIMSELF UP AND LEAVE A WORLD STERILIZED BY HIS GENIUS



BUT, MAN, OR WHAT THE RADIATION AND THE CONSTANT HOT RAINS AND HIGH ROENTGEN DUST STORMS MAKE HIM, WILL STILL CLING TENACIOUSLY TO HIS QUESTIONABLE RIGHT TO SURVIVE..... HIS INALIENABLE RIGHT TO CONTINUE STRIPPING HIS RAPED WORLD.....

IN THE LATE AFTERNOON, WHEN THE LIGHT BREEZE BLOWS THE HISSING SAND, A FORM, A CREATURE, AN UGLY VERSION OF A ONCE-MAN, PADS ACROSS THE WARM SAND..... HE IS A MUTATION BELONGING, LIKE AN ANIMAL TO THE 'RADIOS', A REMNANT OF LONG PAST CIVILIZATIONS... HE IS A LOPER, A RADIO CONTROLLED LOPER, SCOUTING AHEAD OF A RADIO TRANSPORT....

BOOM
SMACK
ARGH!
KRUP
OOOOOOH...
SKAP
HUH? COUGH... NO! NOT KILL THIS ONE! ..... NO KILL!!
PUNCH
CLICK CLACK

THE LOPER IS LEFT TO LAY AND ROT QUIETLY IN THE COZY CREEK BED....HE IS OF NO CONSEQUENCE NOW, HE WILL ROT OR BE EATIN' BY SOME STARVING MUTATION...IT DOESN'T MATTER...WE FOLLOW HIS KILLER, A SLIGHTLY BUILT MAN-LIKE CREATURE WHO WEARS THE NOT UNCOMMON 'WHITE CLOTH' TO HIDE HIS UGLY DEFORMITY...HE CLIMBS UP THE CRUMBLING HILL FEELING A DEEPNESS, A HEAVYNESS OF PURPOSE THAT OVER SHADOWS THE RIGHT OR WRONG OF MURDER...HIS RIDING ANIMAL, A GRASSER, MUNCHES ON DUST WEED.. IT WATCHES THE LITTLE MASTER WITH UNCONCERN..THE MAN-CREATURE PULLS THE GRASSER TO ITS KNEES AND MOUNTS THE CREEKY LEATHER SADDLE..HE SHOVES HIS WOLF CARBINE INTO THE SADDLE SCABBARD, DRAWS HARD WITH THE REINS, KICKING THE DUMB BEAST UP ON ITS FEET....THE GRASSER MOVES OFF WITH A SLOW, DELIBERATE STRIDE..ROCKING OR WADDLING ALONG NARROW PATHS HIGH ABOVE THE CANYON FLOOR.....

THIS BEGINS IT, THIS STARTS THE PROPHECY OF THE FUTURE, THE HISSING SAND, AND THE LONELY FIGURE HIGH ATOP A PLAINS BEAST....THIS IS WHERE I BEGIN THE UNIQUE STORY OF THE LITTLE MAN-CREATURE WHO IS KNOWN TO A FEW MUTATIONS, TO A FEW ANIMALS, TO A FEW FLYING THINGS AS:

COBALT 60

by VAUGHN BODE' 1968

ALRIGHT..YOU BE EASY NOW, BIG ANIMAL....I SEE..... WHAT I AM LOOKING FOR...

SNIFF

...THE RADIO TRANSPORT IS COMING...

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PONK PONK PONK
RADIO BORDER STATION, WE CALL YOU...WE CALL YOU..
POP CRACK..YES... PACK PIC, POP ..SPEAK NOW..
WE HAVE HEARD HEAVY RIFLE SHOTS FAR UP THE CANYON... IT DID NOT SOUND LIKE A RADIO 'PUNCHER'..DO YOUR LOPERS PATROL THERE?
PIC PIC CRACKLE DO NO PATROL... KREEEE..AND BE WATCHFUL...
STARDUST, TELL THEM OUR LOPER SCOUT IS OUT TOO LONG....
PUT PONK PONK
MORE CAUSE FOR SUSPICION...THERE CAN BE MUTATIONS UP THERE...
SONG, YOU WILL PREPARE THE MECHANICAL GUN...
HAHA, THE SOUND OF GUNFIRE WAS A BLUE CRACKER AT ITS WORK, EH?.. YOU WORRY TOO EASY, HONORED ONE...

BOOM!
..OH HOLY GOD.... STARDUST, GET TO THE MECHANICAL GUN. QUICKLY!!....
SEE YOUR BEAST GET TO ACTION..!
BOOM!
YAR!
SNIC
KUNK!
YOU PIG!!
ZIP!
EEEEEE

I SEE THA' BASTARD!!
BANG BANG!!
BUMP
THUMP
YARGH!
DA, DAMN YA, YOU!!!
OOOOH
CLICK
PUNT
CLICK
CLICK
PUNT
OOOOOH GEESSS KAK'COUGH!

MAKE US COVER!...SHOOT DOWN THE GREAT GRASSER!!
BUNT BUNT BUNT
PING PING PING
'SNIFF, DAMN THEM!...SNIFF:' I WILL CIRCLE TO KILL THEM NOW...'COUGH'.
HONORED ONE, DID,..DID WE HIT HIM?..ALL IS QUIET.....
BE STILL... WE WAIT...
DEAD MEN!
click
KLAK
CLICK
RUNT
CLICK
RUNT
PLEEEE
THOK
SPLAT

WHAT?.. JESUS, THA' LOPER!!
RARRGH!
KOOOFE!
SUNCH!
GASP..CAN'T..GET.. YARRRGH!
...HO!...SQUIRM AWAY LIKE WORM FISH!...PA-TOOY! YOU BREAK LOPER'S TOOTH...
NO, LISTEN! IT'S OVER! I WANTED THE RADIOS...WE CAN STOP.... LISTEN!!... I..COUGH, COUGH...
HEHEHE..
YOU SCARDED TOFIGHT, BIG LOPER....
WOOOO
.....I...SMASH LITTLE SKULL, WORM-MAN!
CHING
HEY!
YOU DIRTY...

...PIG!
SSZINK
GAK'..HUH, HUH ...CHOKE..GURGLE GURGLE..GURGLE....
..COUGH, COUGH HACK, COUGH'..
WHA'..COUGH'..WHAT ARE YOU STARING AT DEAD MAN'?....
DON'T LOOK AT ME!!
...I SEE....YOU... A MUTATION...I SEE YOU ARE... MAN-LIKE....BUT ...YOU ARE NOT HUMAN...!....
JUST... SHUTUP AN DIE!....
I...I SEE...YOU... YOU WISH..TO BE HUMAN LIKE US... BUT...YOU ARE A MONSTER'..
SHUTUP! SHUTUP! SHUTUP!

YOU ARE THE MURDERERS, YOU ARE THE MONSTERS.. THE RADIO ARE TRYING TO EXTERMINATE ALL MUTANT RACES. GENOCIDE!
CLICK
PUNCH
PLOOSH
..I....AM....A
.....
IN THE EARLY EVENING, THE WIND DIES AND THE HISSING SAND IS STILL AND A COOL QUIET HANGS OVER THE EMPTY, STERILE PLACES... COBALT 60 RIDES SLOWLY AWAY ON HIS PLAINS ANIMAL... OFF INTO THE GREAT OLD MOUNTAINS.....
SSSSS
VANGUIN BODE
THE END OF THE FIRST ONE..

COBALT-60

BASED ON CHARACTERS BY
VAUGHN BODĒ

ARTWORK BY
MARK BODĒ

STORY BY
LARRY TODD

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RADIO CITY
MARK BODE
IT IS I, POLONIUM 210, OH GREAT PUISSANT MASTER..
OH, IT'S ONLY YOU..
SO, WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN, I CALLED FOR YOU AN HOUR AGO!
SIRE, I WAS DOWN IN THE ARMY BARRACKS ESCORTING THE TROOPS TO FURTHER EFFORTS

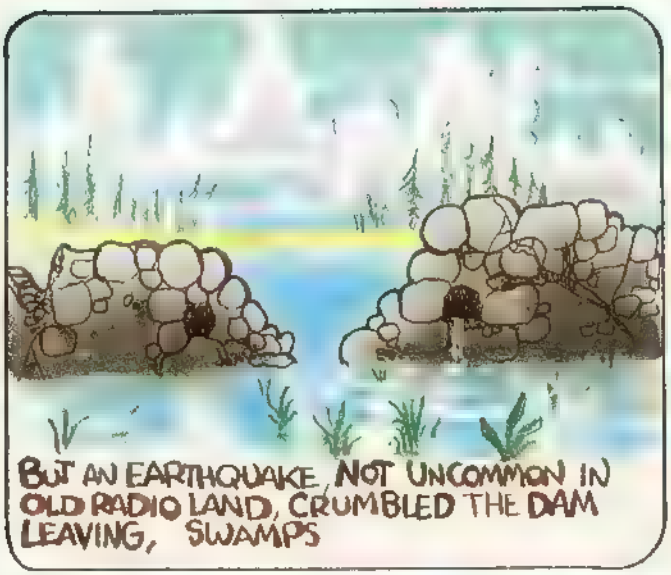
SO, HAVE THEY KILLED ANY MUTANTS LATELY?!
MANY SIRE, AND THE ARMY FOUND A FAMILY OF MARGINALS IN THE CITY LIMITS
IN THE CITY!! THOSE TWITS THAT IS THE DUTY OF THE GENE POLICE!
AND THE GENE POLICE OBEY THE HOLY MOLDERS AND YOU KNOW WHAT THEY THINK OF YOUR ORDERS
DAMN THE HOLY MOLDERS!
IT SHOULD BE SO EASY
AND YOU KNOW WHAT I THINK OF YOUR FLEA-BRAIN REMARKS!
I ... YES SIRE... UH
210, WHY DO THE MOLDERS RESENT MY RULE? I STRIVE TO PURGE THE RACE OF ITS ADDLED GENES, EVEN AS THEY DO, YET THEY UNDERCUT MY AUTHORITY AT EVERY PASS.. WHY?
PERHAPS, THEY ARE JEALOUS MY LEIGE THEY WANT THE POWER OF THE HADATCHI THRONE FOR THEMSELVES.
IS THAT IT!!?

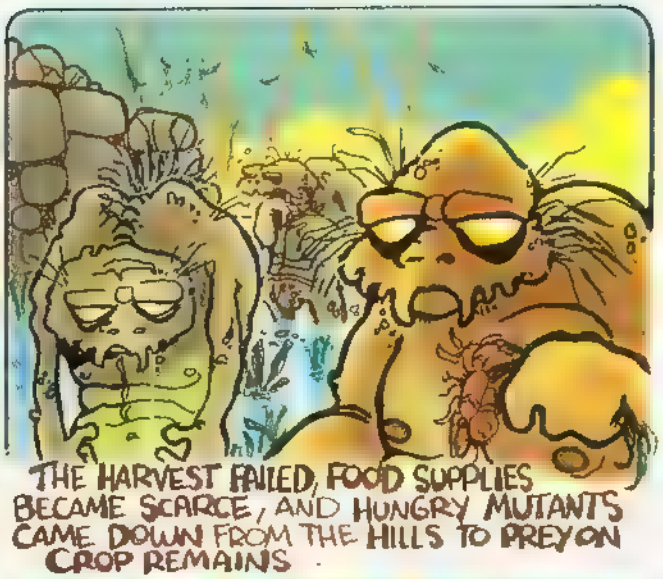
SIRE, WHAT ELSE COULD THEY HOPE TO GAIN? DOES NOT EVERYONE HOPE TO GAIN THE THRONE?
DOES EVERYBODY DO YOU 210?! DO YOU SEEK MY THRONE!
I?. GREAT ROENTIGENS, SIRE, WHY SHOULD I? I HAVE A ROLE WELL BEFITTING MY POSITION, ALREADY
OH SHIT! NOW WHAT? COME IN!!
SIRE, THE COLONEL OF THE GUARD REQUESTS AN AUDIENCE WITH YOUR EMMINENCE AND WITH PRIMEMINISTER 210..
OH
LOPER GET THE THRONE!!
CRACK POP
I GUESS I SHOULD SHOW MYSELF TO THOSE MISERABLE PROTRUSIONS
ZZZZZZ
TO THE AUDIENCE CHAMBER!!

SO WHAT IS THIS URGENT BUSINESS THAT WE SHOULD BE AROUSED FROM OUR WELL EARNED SLUMBERS!
O, GREAT EMPEROR OF THE COSMOS AND ALL THATS IN IT, I PRESENT A POOR SOLDIER BACK FROM PATROL.
YECH! WHAT A MESS! YOU BROUGHT HIM BEFORE US IN THIS CONDITION? I OUGHT TO HAVE YOU FLAYED CAPTAIN!
AH, AS YOU WILL SIRE. I THOUGHT THAT HE MIGHT DIE AND THAT TIME WAS OF THE ESSENCE
WELL, LETS HEAR IT!
SPEAK YOU RADIO SCUM!!!

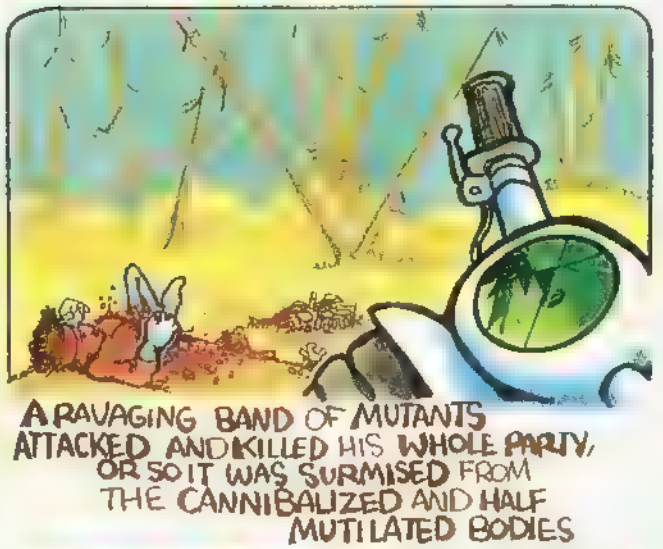
SIRE, I WAS A TOPGUNNER WITH A PERIMETER PATROL OVER EAST IN THE SACTO CRATER TERRITORY. WE WERE 8 OF US, 2 MOTO TRACKS 2 LOPERS, A TRANSPORT GRASSER GAK
RRRRNNN-
RN-RN-MERRR
THUMPA
THUMPA
THUMPA
WE WERE AMBUSHED SIRE!! SHOT TO PIECES BY A HIDDEN SNIPER WHO COULD, IT SEEMS BE IN 3 PLACES AT ONCE!! HE SLEW US ALL BY GUN AND KNIFE, SAVE ME, WHOM HE LEFT FOR DEAD.
WHO, WAS HE?
BKAM
BKAM
BKAM
CLIC
CLIC
PA-TANG
LOPER KILL MASKED MA AGG!
SIRE, NEVER I SAW HIS FACE HE WORE A WHITE CLOTH SURELY HE WAS A MARGINAL THOUGH HIS CHEST AND ARMS SHOWED NO SIGNS OF OBVIOUS MUT
CONTINUE!!!
GASP
SPEAK YOU FOOL! WELL HAVE YOU—
THE USELESS SHIT IS DEAD SIRE.
DEAD! HOW DARE HE DIE IN OUR AUGUST PRESENCE! HAVE HIM THROWN TO THE CESS PIT!!!
SIRE!!
HAVE IT DONE! DO YOU WISH TO FOLLOW HIM!!
GULP
AH, AS AS YOU WILL SIRE!!
SIRE, THAT I WAS NOT WISE
WHAT WAS NOT WISE?!

FE 56 WOULD NEVER HAVE DONE SUCH A THING AS, AS CAST THE BODY OF A YOUNG HERO IN THE SEWER
FE 56 WAS A COWARD AND A WEAKLING! HE NEVER DID SHIT ABOUT THE MUTANTS!
THE MUTANTS WERE NOT AGGRESSIVE DURING FE 56'S REIGN
BUT THEY ARE NOW, PIN BRAIN!! SPEAK TO ME NOT OF FE 56!
THE RADIO PEOPLE HAD LOVED FE 56 FOR HE WAS HANDSOME, HE HAD A PRETTY WIFE, AND HE RODE A WHITE MOTOTRACK.
HE RULED WITH A SLIGHTLY INEPT HAND, BUT IT DIDN'T MATTER BECAUSE THERE WERE NO TROUBLES IN OLD RADIO LAND...
THERE WAS PLENTY OF FOOD, AND MUCH WATER FOR IRRIGATION OF CROPS, PROVIDED BY AN ANCIENT DAM SITE CALLED, LAKE BARIESA

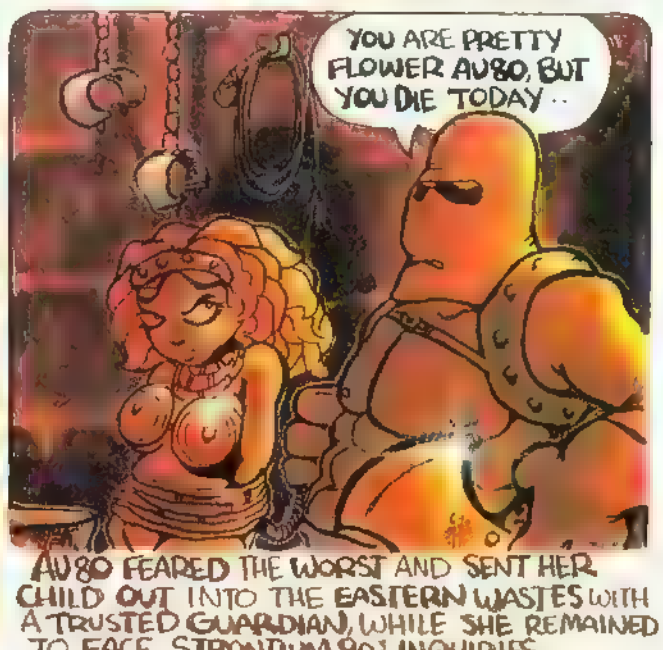

BUT AN EARTHQUAKE, NOT UNCOMMON IN OLD RADIO LAND, CRUMBLED THE DAM LEAVING, SWAMPS

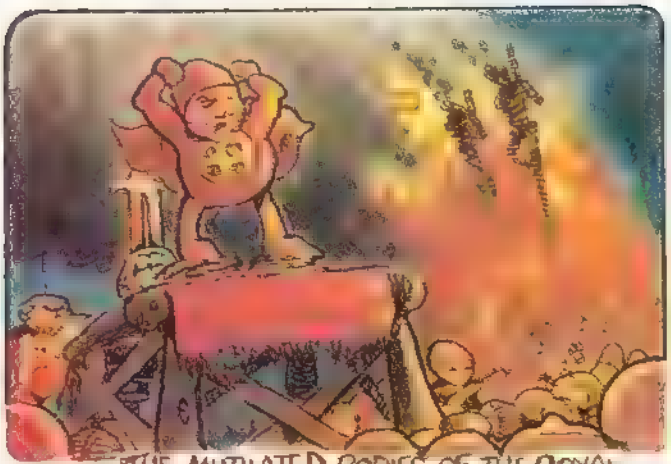

THE HARVEST FAILED, FOOD SUPPLIES BECAME SCARCE, AND HUNGRY MUTANTS CAME DOWN FROM THE HILLS TO PREY ON CROP REMAINS

FE 56 WENT OUT TO LAKE BARIESA DAM TO VIEW WHAT HAD HAPPENED, AND HERE TRAGEDY STRUCK-


A RAVAGING BAND OF MUTANTS ATTACKED AND KILLED HIS WHOLE PARTY, OR SO IT WAS SURMISED FROM THE CANNIBALIZED AND HALF MUTILATED BODIES

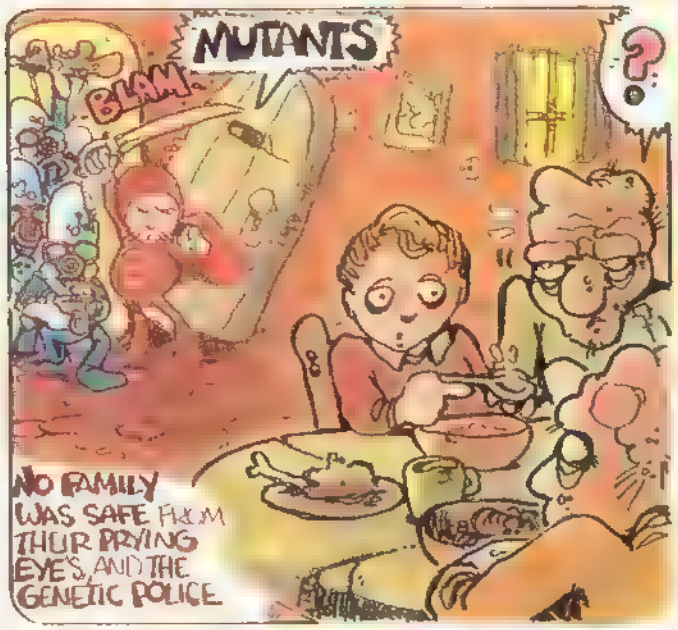
FIND THEM! FIND THEM! FIND THEM!
FE 56'S PRIME MINISTER STRONTIUM 90, PRONOUNCED HIMSELF REGENT AND SENT HIS AGENTS HUNTING FOR FE 56'S CONSORT AU 80 AND HIS SON COBALT 60

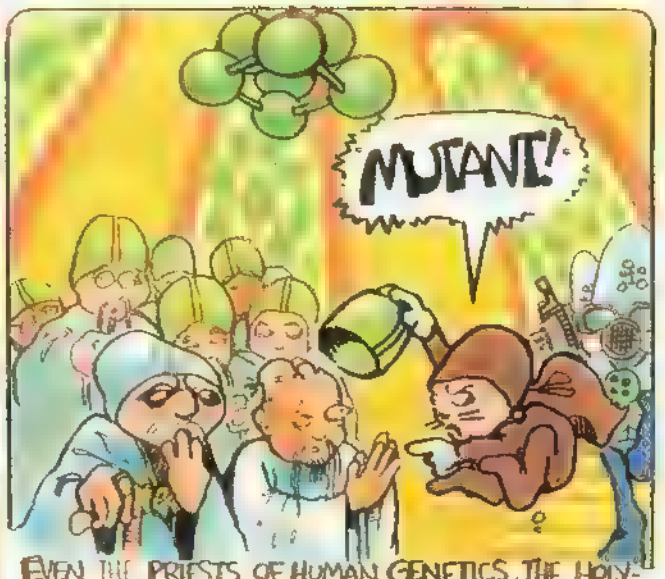

YOU ARE PRETTY FLOWER AU 80, BUT YOU DIE TODAY..
AU 80 FEARED THE WORST AND SENT HER CHILD OUT INTO THE EASTERN WASTES WITH A TRUSTED GUARDIAN, WHILE SHE REMAINED TO FACE STRONTIUM 90'S INQUIRIES.



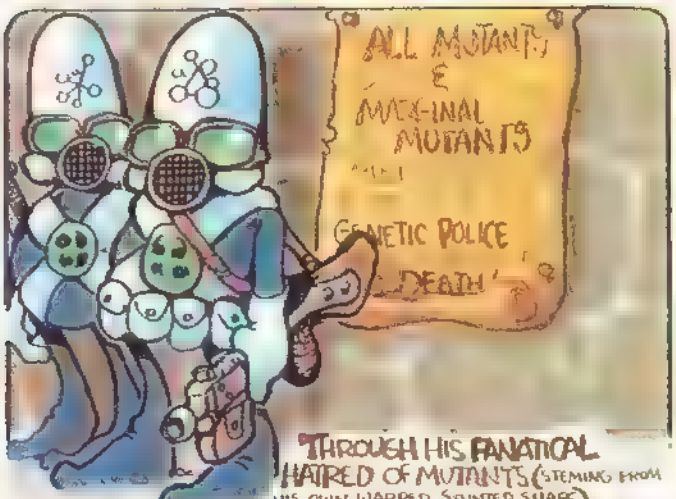
THE MUTILATED BODIES OF THE ROYAL FAMILY WERE DISPLAYED BEFORE A PUBLIC CREMATION, STRONTIUM 90 VOWED EVERLASTING VENGEANCE ON THE MUTANT SCUM THAT DID THIS DEED

THE OLD COLONEL OF A RADIOISOTOPIC FAMILY, POLONIUM 210, WAS ELEVATED TO PRIME MINISTER, AND HE CROWNED STRONTIUM 90 KING & EMPEROR AND THE TWO CONDUCTED A REIGN OF TERROR.
WE DID IT STRONTIUM!
HEH!

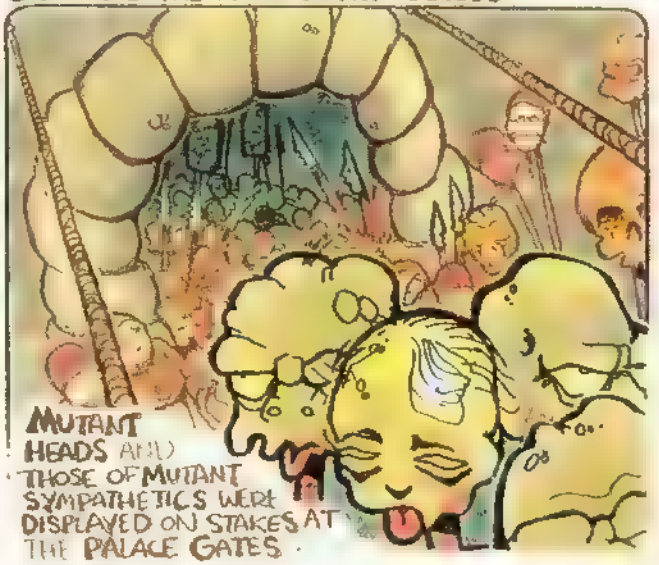




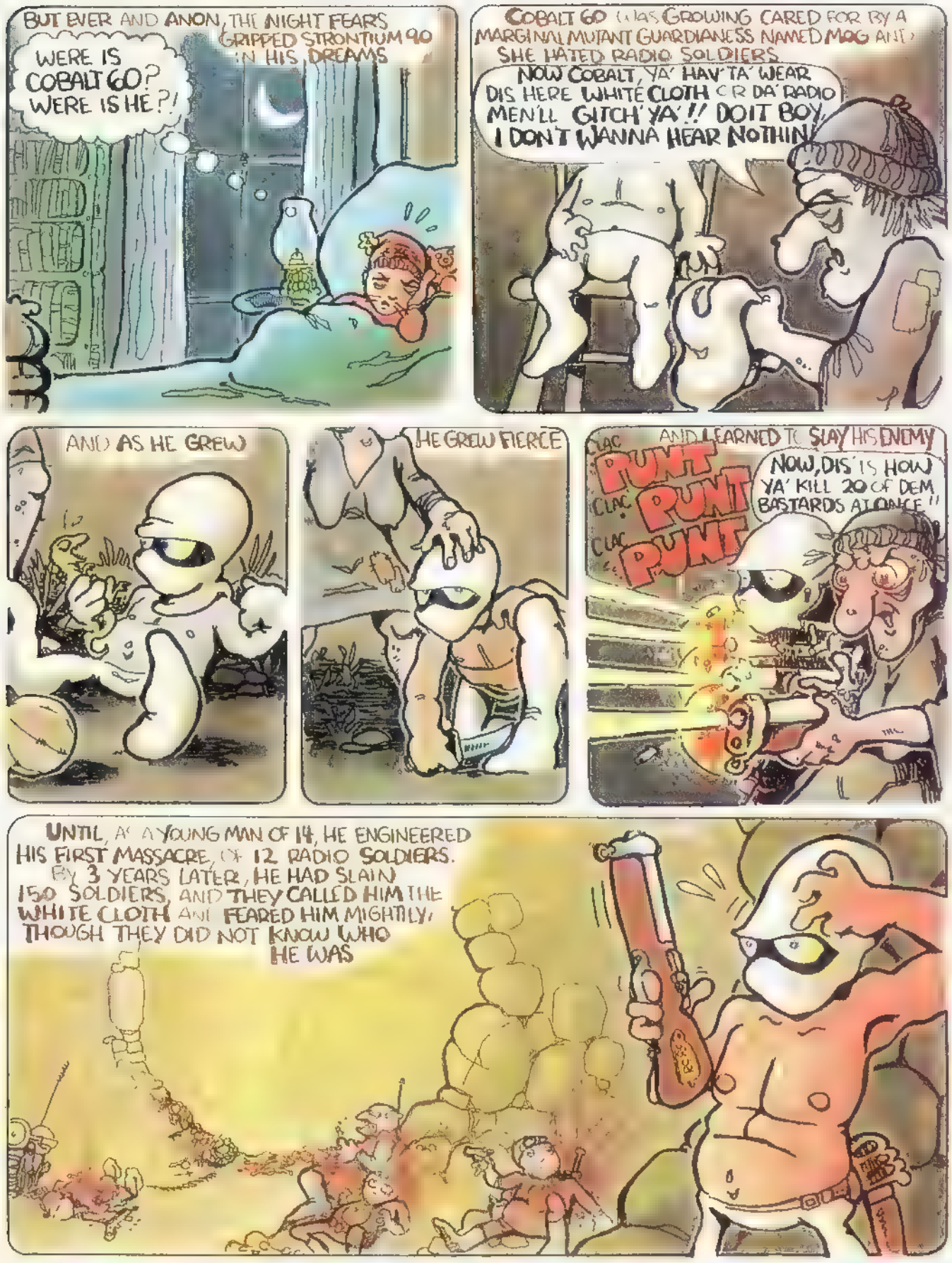
EVEN THE PRIESTS OF HUMAN GENETICS, THE HOLY-MOLDERS, WERE SUSPECTED BY STRONTIUM NOT LEAST BECAUSE THEY CONTROLLED THE GENETIC POLICE, WHO ENFORCED THE STERILIZATION EDICTS



THROUGH HIS FANATICAL HATRED OF MUTANTS (STEMMING FROM HIS OWN WARPED STUNTED SHAPE) STRONTIUM 90 FORCED THE GENE POLICE TO EVER TIGHTER ENFORCEMENT OF THE POLICY OF PURITY. FAMILIES WITH MARGINAL MUTANT MEMBERS HAD TO FLEE



MUTANT HEADS AND THOSE OF MUTANT SYMPATHETICS WERE DISPLAYED ON STAKES AT THE PALACE GATES.

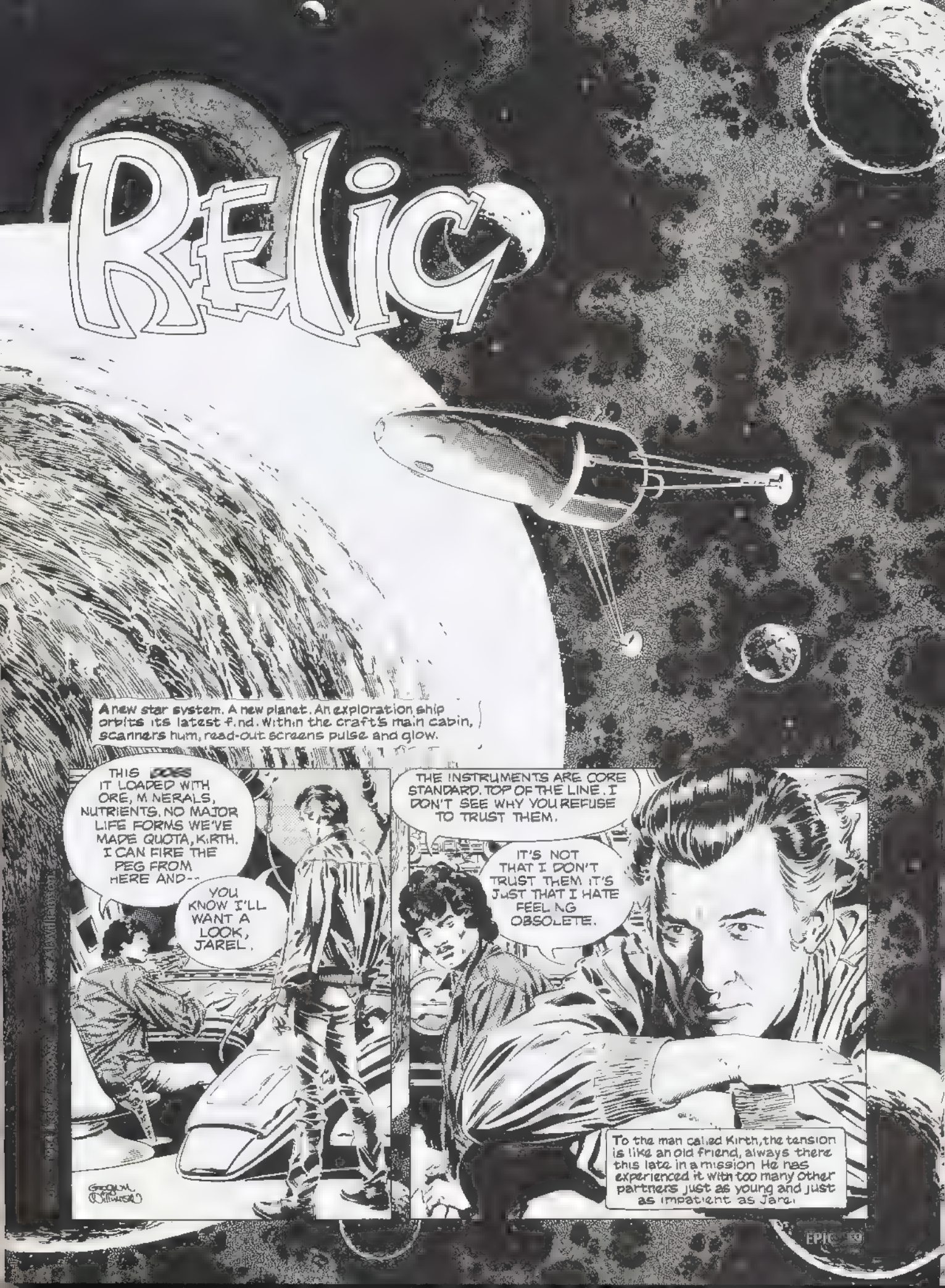

BUT EVER AND ANON, THE NIGHT FEARS GRIPPED STRONTIUM 90 IN HIS DREAMS
WERE IS COBALT 60? WERE IS HE?!
COBALT 60 WAS GROWING CARED FOR BY A MARGINAL MUTANT GUARDIANESS NAMED MOG AND SHE HATED RADIO SOLDIERS.
NOW COBALT, YA' HAV TA' WEAR DIS HERE WHITE CLOTH OR DA' RADIO MEN'LL GITCH YA'!! DOIT BOY, I DON'T WANNA HEAR NOTHIN!
AND AS HE GREW
HE GREW FIERCE
AND LEARNED TO SLAY HIS ENEMY
CLAC PUNT CLAC PUNT CLAC PUNT
NOW, DIS IS HOW YA' KILL 20 OF DEM BASTARDS AT ONCE!!
UNTIL, AT A YOUNG MAN OF 14, HE ENGINEERED HIS FIRST MASSACRE, OF 12 RADIO SOLDIERS. BY 3 YEARS LATER, HE HAD SLAIN 150 SOLDIERS, AND THEY CALLED HIM THE WHITE CLOTH AND FEARED HIM MIGHTILY, THOUGH THEY DID NOT KNOW WHO HE WAS

SOON THEY WOULD KNOW A NAME FOR, THE WHITE CLOTH
COBALT 60 // THE ANGEL OF DEATH! DESTROYER OF THE RADIO PEOPLE!
SHE LOVES ME, SHE LOVES ME NOT
MARK BODÉ 84

BBC
(HEIRESS TO THE THRONE)
SIRE YOUR DINNER SHALL I BRING IT IN?
YES
THE ROYAL FLOWER GROWS RIPE, ZIO
UH YES SIRE
I SHALL HARVEST THIS FERTILE BLOOM, AND PLANT MY OWN SEED
BUT, THE HOLY MOLDERS DO NOT APPROVE SIRE!
TO HELL WITH THOSE MEDDLING ASSES, THEY CANNOT TELL ME WHO I CAN OR CANNOT WED!!!

YOU DONT SOUND VERY CONVINCED 210, IS YOUR LOYALTY WAVERING?
MY LOYALTY, SIRE IS NOT IN QUESTION! THE PRUDENCE OF YOUR INTENTIONS IS IN QUESTION..
GULP
PRAY, 210, WHY IS MY DESIRE TO BE GROOM TO BBC.. ALL... IMPRUDENT?
WELL?!! YOU HALF ASSED SIDE KICK!!
SIRE... FE 56 WAS VERY TALL THE RADIO PEOPLE LIKE TALL LEADERS
210...
YES SIRE?
WHEN I SIT, IN THE HADATCHI THRONE, I AM TALLER THEN FE 56 WAS. IS THAT NOT ENOUGH!
UH. YES SIRE.
LEAVE ME NOW...
YES SIRE..

COBALT 60 continues next issue


Relic
A new star system. A new planet. An exploration ship orbits its latest find. Within the craft's main cabin, scanners hum, read-out screens pulse and glow.
THIS DOES IT LOADED WITH ORE, MINERALS, NUTRIENTS. NO MAJOR LIFE FORMS WE'VE MADE QUOTA, KIRTH. I CAN FIRE THE PEG FROM HERE AND--
YOU KNOW I'LL WANT A LOOK, JAREL.
THE INSTRUMENTS ARE CORE STANDARD. TOP OF THE LINE. I DON'T SEE WHY YOU REFUSE TO TRUST THEM.
IT'S NOT THAT I DON'T TRUST THEM. IT'S JUST THAT I HATE FEELING OBSOLETE.
To the man called Kirth, the tension is like an old friend, always there this late in a mission. He has experienced it with too many other partners just as young and just as impatient as Jarel.

Begrudgingly, the younger man programs a descent. The ship sweeps down, carrying them low over landscape startling in its variety after the vastness of space.
WE ARE OBSOLETE KIRTH.. CORE IS PHASING OUT HUMAN BACK-UPS ON THESE PROBES
IF THEY DIDN'T OFFER TWO-LEVEL ADVANCEMENTS FOR SIGNING ON THESE TRIPS, DO YOU THINK I'D BE HERE?
WELL, THERE'S CERTAINLY NOT THE SAME EXCITEMENT AS ON MY FIRST PROBE BEFORE EVERYTHING WAS ALL INSTRUMENTS AND--
I SAW SOMETHING OUT THE PORT, JAREL! THERE'S JUNGLE COMING UP... WE'LL SET DOWN AT ITS EDGE!
WHAT?!
MOST TEAMS WOULDN'T EVEN DO A FLY-OVER, KIRTH! NOTHING ON OUR SCANNERS JUSTIFIES THIS WHY NOT PLANT OUR HOMING-PEG AND GET OUT OF HERE?
BECAUSE I'M SENIOR EXPEDITION MEMBER, AND WE'RE PLAYING THIS MY WAY BEFORE SIGNALLING FOR THE SAPPERS.
SAPPERS. Kirth wonders how many planets he has found for them in his long years of service, worlds sucked dry of every natural resource by these mammoth interstellar drone-craft to provide food, fuel, and raw materials for Core's billions upon billions of dependent citizens ..
...and why he continues to resist the notion of turning over the probing for ever more such worlds to machines as well.

Then, they are down
HOT! AND THE STENCH! ALL THOSE TREES. PLANTS...! NO CLIMATE CONTROL, NO ATMOSPHERE REGULATION. NOTHING'S WORTH THIS!
I GLIMPSED SOMETHING AS WE FLEW THIS WAY... A FLASH OF LIGHT.. SOMETHING CATCHING THE SUN..
CURIOSITY! WE'RE DAWDLING IN SOME GALACTIC BACKWATER BECAUSE YOU'RE CURIOUS!
COME ON, JAREL. HAVEN'T YOU EVER WANTED TO SEE AT LEAST ONE OF THE WORLDS WE'VE PEGGED FOR SAPPING UP CLOSE?
THIS PLANET WILL WRAP OUR MISSION, AND CORE WILL PROBABLY INSIST I RETIRE ALLOW ME A SMALL WHIM.
WITH YOUR CREDITS YOU COULD HAVE BEEN A TENTH-LEVEL EXEC BY NOW, KIRTH, ONLY THIS KIND OF STUNT KEEPS HOLDING YOU BACK.
JAREL, HOW MANY WORLDS HAVE BEEN TURNED INTO USELESS HUSKS ON OUR WORD? IT NAGS ME JUST THIS ONE LAST TIME I WANT TO BE CERTAIN WHAT I'M CONDEMNING TO DESTRUCTION.
CORE HAS PRECISE GUIDELINES ABOUT INTELLIGENT LIFE IF IT EXISTED HERE, THE INSTRUMENTS WOULD HAVE SHOWN IT ALL YOU'RE GOING TO FIND--
--ARE THE KIND OF STUPID SUB-SPECIES THAT ALREADY OVERRUN THE WHOLE GALAXY!

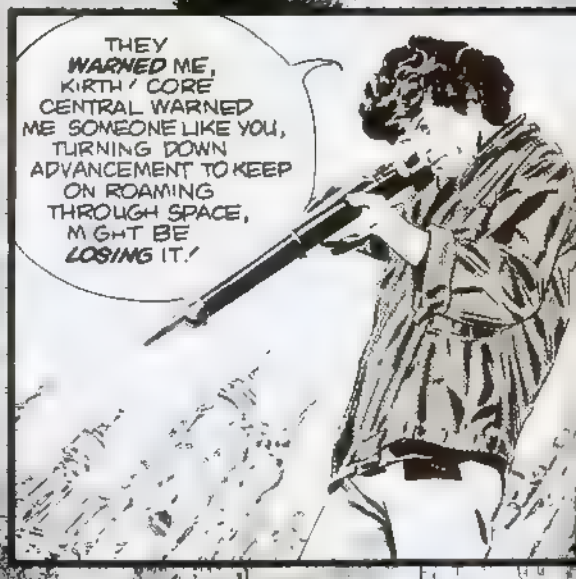
MAYBE NOT, JAREL
AT LEAST WE KNOW THAT FLASH OF LIGHT I SPOTTED WASN'T MY IMAGINATION
DESERTED! PERHAPS FOR CENTURIES... THAT'S WHY THE INSTRUMENTS DIDN'T REVEAL ANYTHING WHOEVER BUILT THIS IS LONG EXTINCT!
They move toward the towers glistening in the strange system's brilliant sun light Despite the heat, the physical activity feels good to Kirth, almost as good as the excitement mounting inside him as they near their goal But...

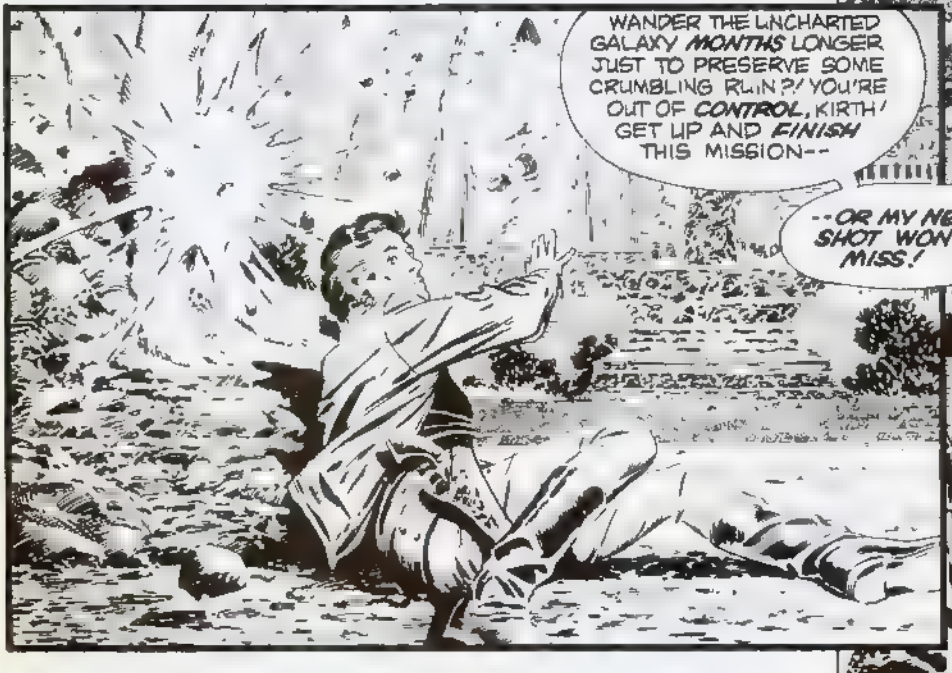
AND JUST AS WELL THEY ARE! THE BUILDINGS ARE SO ALIEN.. SO MANY CARVINGS... DECORATIONS...
HAS TO BE THE WORK OF MONSTERS, KIRTH. DEFINITELY NOT LIKE ANY OF THE RACES WHO MAKE UP CORE!
THIS DOESN'T SEEM TO BE YOUR DAY TO BE RIGHT, JAREL
WHAT'S IT DOING HERE? IT SERVES NO FUNCTION.. LIKE SO MUCH ELSE IN THIS CITY!
Kirth could understand Jarel's unease. In all the million worlds of Core, with their blocks and tiers of efficient and uniform structures, there was nothing like this. And yet...
IN ITS OWN WAY, IT'S NOT WITHOUT A CERTAIN APPEAL...
USELESS! NO WONDER THE CREATORS OF THIS PLACE DIED OFF. THEIR ART, THEIR ARCHITECTURE IS TOTALLY INDULGENT DECADENT! CORE COULD MAKE THIS SPACE ALONE HOUSE THOUSANDS.
BUT THEY COULDN'T MAKE IT LOOK LIKE THIS. THE MORE I STUDY THE PLACE, JAREL, THE MORE I THINK I COULD SPEND DAYS HERE... WEEKS...
WE'VE ALREADY BEEN HERE TOO LONG! NO MORE WHIMS, KIRTH! BACK TO THE SHIP--
--I'M PLANTING THE PEG SO WE CAN RETURN TO CIVILIZATION AND THIS JUNKYARD CAN BE SAPPED FOR ALL IT'S REALLY WORTH!

THE CITY WILL BE DESTROYED, JAREL...TURNED TO DUST BY THE TIME THE SAPPING'S DONE! WE CAN'T--

WE CAN DO THE JOB CORE EXPECTS US TO DO! IF YOU'VE BEEN TOO MANY YEARS ON THE PROBES TO DO IT RIGHT...I HAVEN'T!

THERE'S BEAUTY HERE, JAREL. AND SO MANY OTHER PLANETS FOR CORE'S NEEDS THIS IS UNIQUE. LET IT STAND.


THEY WARNED ME, KIRTH! CORE CENTRAL WARNED ME SOMEONE LIKE YOU, TURNING DOWN ADVANCEMENT TO KEEP ON ROAMING THROUGH SPACE, MIGHT BE LOSING IT!

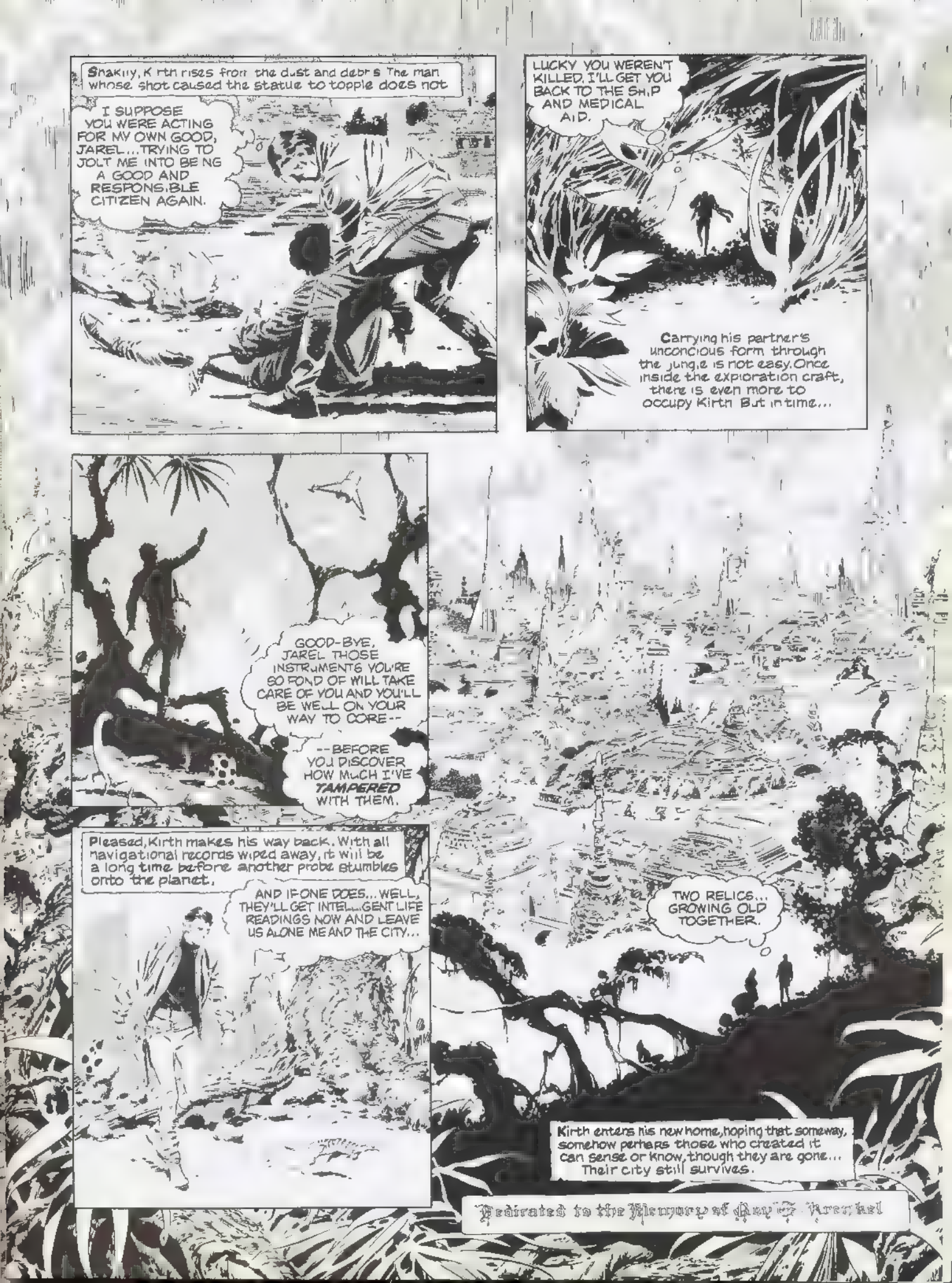

WANDER THE UNCHARTED GALAXY MONTHS LONGER JUST TO PRESERVE SOME CRUMBLING RUIN?! YOU'RE OUT OF CONTROL, KIRTH! GET UP AND FINISH THIS MISSION--
--OR MY NEXT SHOT WON'T MISS!

Shakily, Kirth rises from the dust and debris. The man whose shot caused the statue to topple does not.
I SUPPOSE YOU WERE ACTING FOR MY OWN GOOD, JAREL... TRYING TO JOLT ME INTO BEING A GOOD AND RESPONSIBLE CITIZEN AGAIN.

LUCKY YOU WEREN'T KILLED. I'LL GET YOU BACK TO THE SHIP AND MEDICAL AID.
Carrying his partner's unconcious form through the jungle is not easy. Once inside the exploration craft, there is even more to occupy Kirth. But in time...

GOOD-BYE, JAREL. THOSE INSTRUMENTS YOU'RE SO FOND OF WILL TAKE CARE OF YOU AND YOU'LL BE WELL ON YOUR WAY TO CORE--
--BEFORE YOU DISCOVER HOW MUCH I'VE TAMPERED WITH THEM.

Pleased, Kirth makes his way back. With all navigational records wiped away, it will be a long time before another probe stumbles onto the planet.
AND IF ONE DOES... WELL, THEY'LL GET INTELLIGENT LIFE READINGS NOW AND LEAVE US ALONE. ME AND THE CITY...


TWO RELICS... GROWING OLD TOGETHER.
Kirth enters his new home, hoping that someway, somehow perhaps those who created it can sense or know, though they are gone... Their city still survives.
Dedicated to the Memory of Ray Bradbury

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'BOUT TIME, OLE BANGIN' GUMS, I BEEN SUFFOCATIN' N'ERE.
I SMELL DEATH BLOWING IN LIKE A BREEZE OFF A STAGNANT POND. FLY IN A CIRCLE AN' SEE WHAT'S WHAT.
AWRIGHT... AW RIGHT, JUS KEEP THAT FLAPPIN' BAG O' BEAK N FEATHERS OUTTA M' WAY!
SQUAWK!
I SEE FEAR IT'S A RINGIN' I HEAR LIKE A BUZZIN' GREAT SWARM O' GLASS WINGED BEES. THE 'MENTALS GONE MAD AN' TEARIN' 'MSELVES APART!

FIRE THINGS WAILIN' N' FLAILIN' RIPPIN' A GASH N' THE SOUTHERN SKY. GREAT LEATHER SKINNED RED LIZARDS EATIN' THEM-SELVES TAIL FIRST.
THE ELEMENTS OUT O' WHACK AND WARRING ONE UPON THE OTHER? AND THE FIRE SPIRITS...?
THEY'RE *LEAVIN'* US, OLE BONE-DRY.
...AN SOMPFIN' WET'S CREEPIN' OUT O' TH' WEST... COLDER'N DEAF N' TWICE'T AS ROTTEN.
WHY ARE THE FIRE THINGS LEAVING US, YOUNGER?
THEY FLEE TH' NEW THING. IT HURTS 'EM...
HEY! COME BACK HERE YOU..!
HUH? *OTHER!* COME OUT O' THERE!
OTHER... *WHO'S* 'AT I'NERE WIF YA?

YES·S·S·S·S·SH!
YAHGGGG!
WHAT'S YOUR NAME, WATER?
'N WHERE'S OTHER YA SOULESS SLIME-SPAWNED MENTAL!
NO NAMES·S·SH FOR WITCHES·S·SH.
NAMES·S·SH GIVE POWER. NICE·S·SH ONE GIVES POWER TOO. MYSHELF SMARTER SHINCE THE NICE·S·SH ONE CAME.
AND WHAT AND WHERE IS THE NICE ONE, WATER?
MINE! FEEL'S S·S·SH S·SH·O NICE S·SH!

HMMM...? I'D IMAGINE SO. CAN YOU SPEAK, BOY? WHERE DO YOU COME FROM?
HOW CAN I I SAY? I KNOW NO PLACE BUT THERE.
MMMMMm...
I WAS SKIMMING THE FIRST CURRENTS, WHEN I BANKED TO THE DARK AND SAW A BEAUTIFUL FACE UPON THE SURFACE OF THE DEEP. I DOVE... BARELY GLANCED THE COLD...THEN THIS GRABBED ME, ALL WAS COLD, AND HERE I AM AND CAN'T TELL WHERE.
HERE'S HERE, WHERE ELSE?
SO...THIS IS OTHER'S DOING! LISTEN, WATER, YOU HAVE TO LET HIM GO! HE'S KIN TO FIRE AND CAN'T SHARE PLACE WITH THEM. THEY'LL DIE, AND SO WILL WE!
MYSHELF HATES .S.SH FIRE. FIRE DIE... WITCHES .S.SH DIE... ALL DIE, BUT NICE .S.SH ONE AND WATER.
SURE OF YOURSELF ARE YA? WELL, ALL THAT BURNS ISN'T FIRE. OTHER, YOU LOVESICK WANTON...OPEN THE GATE YOU COAXED HIM THROUGH AND PREPARE TO SEND HIM BACK.
YOUNGER! TO THE KILN! FETCH ME THE LIVE LIME!

PLUCK
T'ANKS, CROW!
C'MOUT FEL..AS. I NEED YA!
HSSSS... COME CLOSER.
B..ESS YOU..JUST A TOUCH.
SO WH TE AND TENDER, A KISS, ANGEL?
Ahhh... CUT IT OUT! WE GOT WORK TO DO!
LAST CHANCE, WATER! LET THE BOY GO!
YOU DIE FIRST, WITCHES-S-SH, WHEN YOUR BLOOD RUNS-S-S COLD. MYSHELF CAN SHTAY COLD LONG TIME!
AS LONG AS LIME STAYS HOT, WATER?
WHOOM!
AHHHHEEEEEEEE! HOW BURNS AND NO FIRE?

SORRY FOR THE TROUBLE, BOY. WE MEANT NO HARM.
LET HIM PASS, OTHER! OUR LOVING DAYS ARE OVER.
MANY THANKS, LADY.
T'WUZ OTHER DID THIS?
THE DAMN FOOL THINKS WE'RE A WARM-THIGHED GIRL OF TWENTY
WHERE IS SHE?
WHERE SHE'S ALWAYS BEEN.
I DON'T KNOW WHY I KEEP YOU TWO...
WE'RE GETTING TOO OLD FOR THIS.

TOADSWART

SYNOPSIS

"What is this Darkness, this consummate Evil pervading all . . . the now forsaken castle chambers . . . the landscapes and villages beyond?" So in the year 982 A.D., from a lonely cell, contemplates the dwarf Toadswart, retainer of Castle Amplestone.

Had it commenced with the mysterious disappearance of the castle's old Lord? Certainly this affected his heir and regent, Prince Waxwroth. Suspecting the country's ruler, the King of the First Dominion, of treacherous designs upon Amplestone province, Waxwroth instituted a policy of oppression and cruel taxation to support a secret defense project.

If the precise beginnings of the Tragedy are vague in Toadswart's memory, not so the relentless events leading to its final act . . . such as the revelation of Waxwroth's secret project. While the rest of Amplestone proceeded with preparations for the investiture of the Prince's son, Rupert — which would also validate Waxwroth as Lord of Amplestone — the Prince locked himself away in the castle depths. There — over the reservations of his Counselor, Bitterburr, and the distain of the old Lord's magician, Lacknose — Waxwroth used knowledge gained with the wealth brutally wrung from his subjects and called upon Dark Forces to bring to life a huge and hideous creation of rag, filth, and clay.

d'AMPLESTONE

A·GOTHIC·TALE · of · HORROR·&·MAGICK

BY·TIM·A·CONRAD

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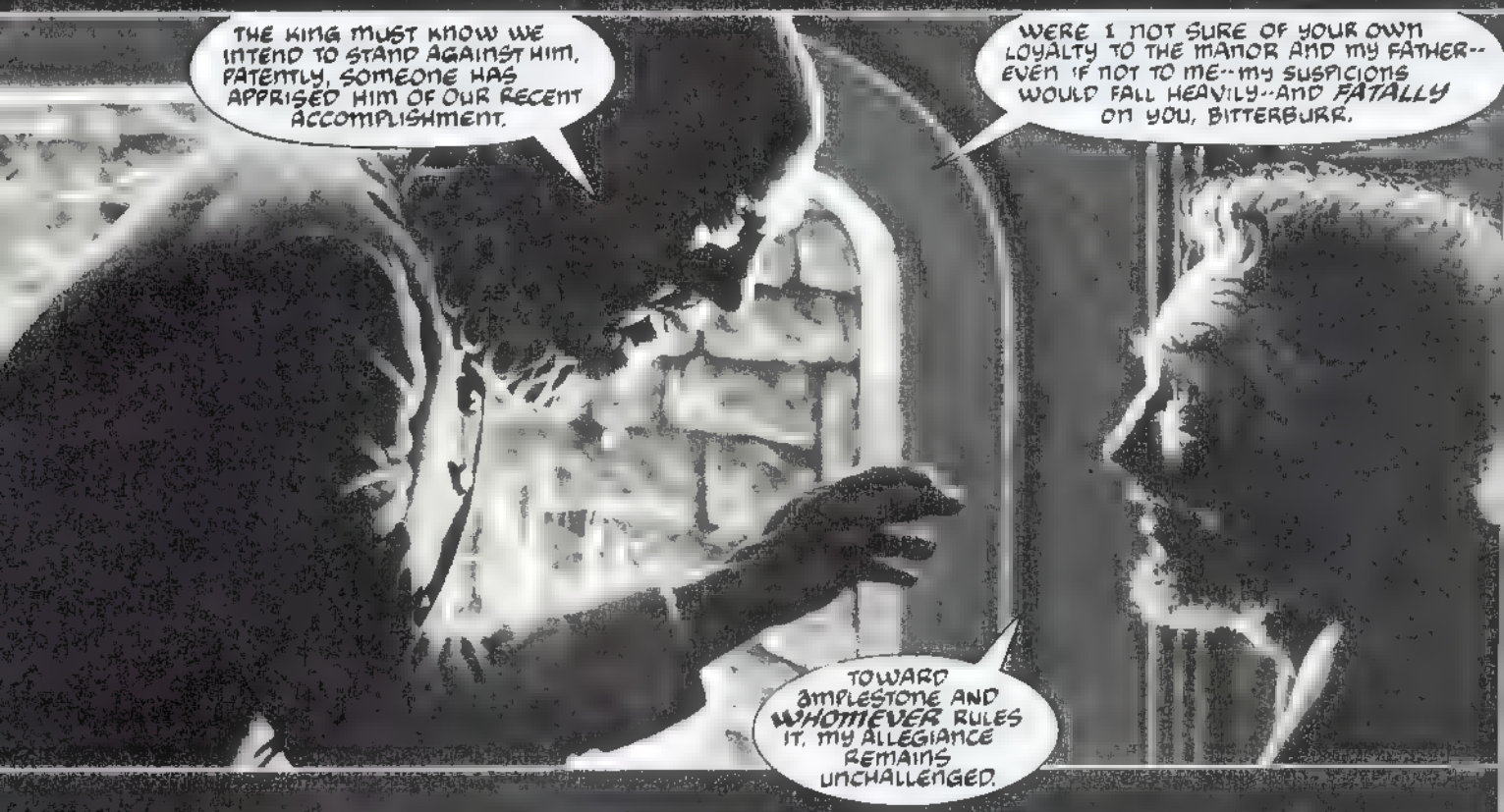
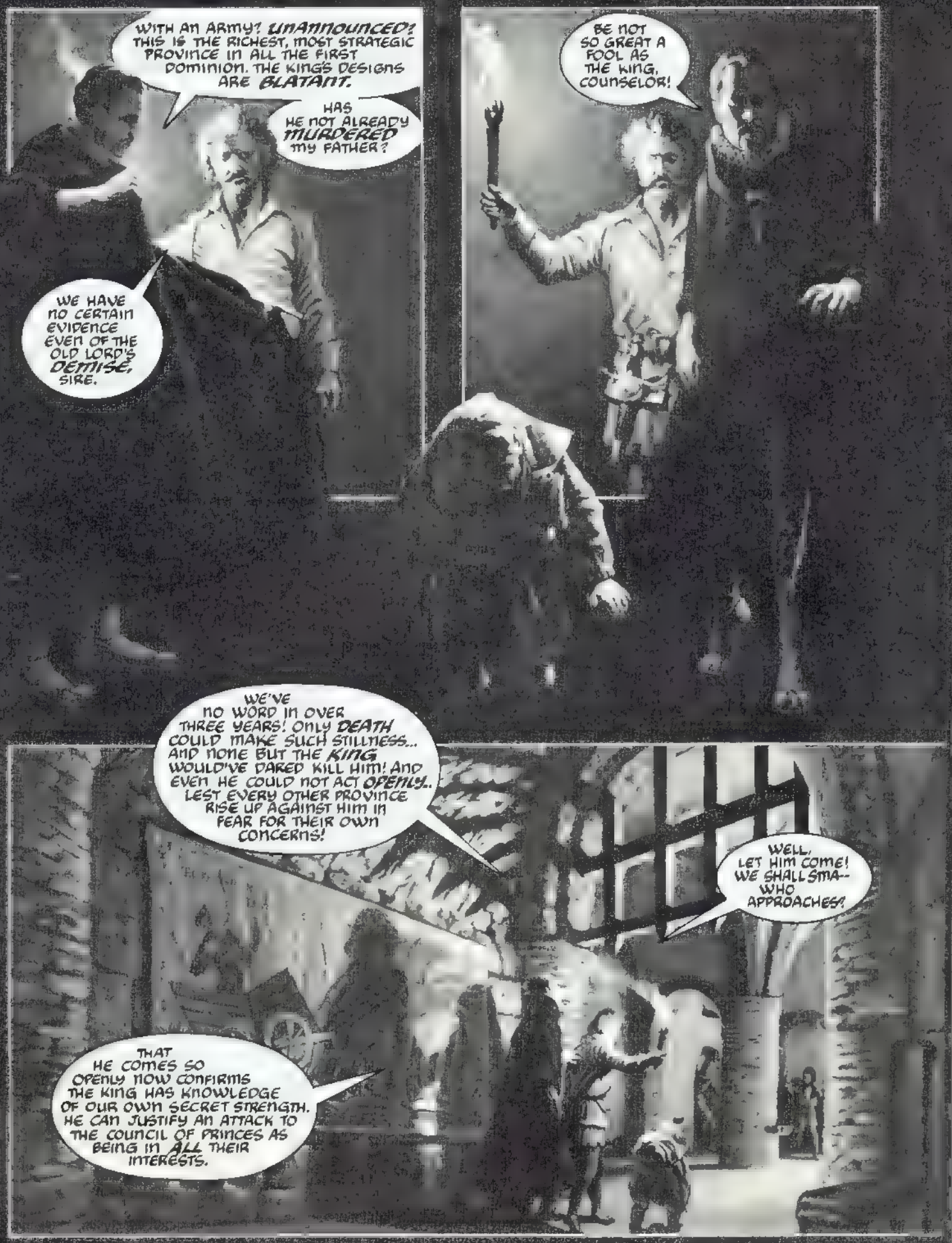
CHAPTER II
ANPALL THE KING'S MEN
TREASON! WE ARE BETRAYED!
'Twas a fortnight following Waxwroth's Unholy Animation of his monstrous Golem—ensconced in a mightily barred and boarded chamber in Amplestone's deepest bowels—when tidings came of the imminent arrival of the King's army.


THE KING MUST KNOW WE INTEND TO STAND AGAINST HIM. PATENTLY, SOMEONE HAS APPRISED HIM OF OUR RECENT ACCOMPLISHMENT.
WERE I NOT SURE OF YOUR OWN LOYALTY TO THE MANOR AND MY FATHER--EVEN IF NOT TO ME--MY SUSPICIONS WOULD FALL HEAVILY--AND FATALLY ON YOU, BITTERBURR.
TOWARD AMPLESTONE AND WHOMEVER RULES IT, MY ALLEGIANCE REMAINS UNCHALLENGED.

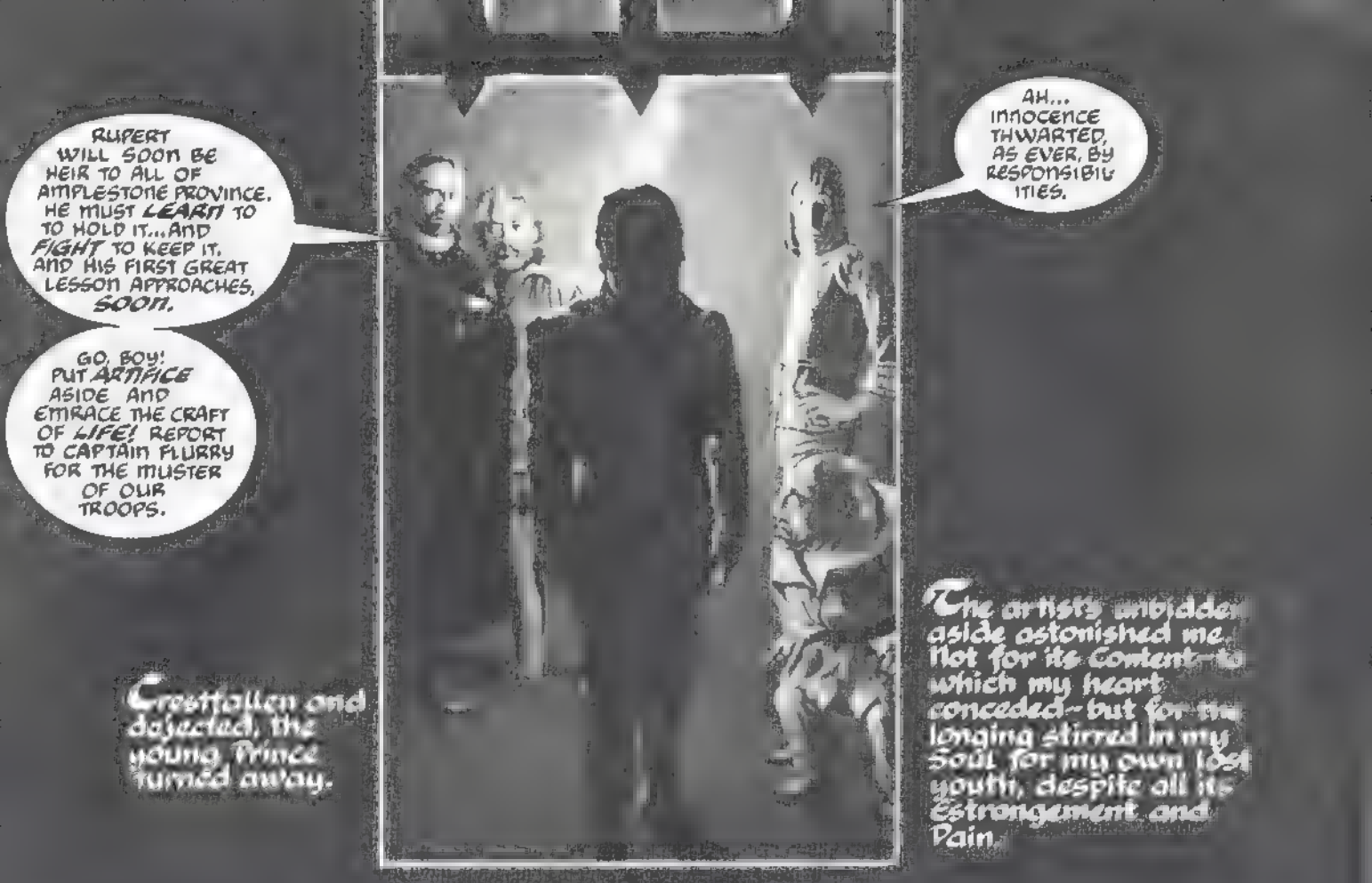
In the flush of his Thaumaturgic Triumph, the Prince had resumed, with frenzied zeal, the preparations for the coming investiture of his son...and the public unveiling of his Ungodly Creation.

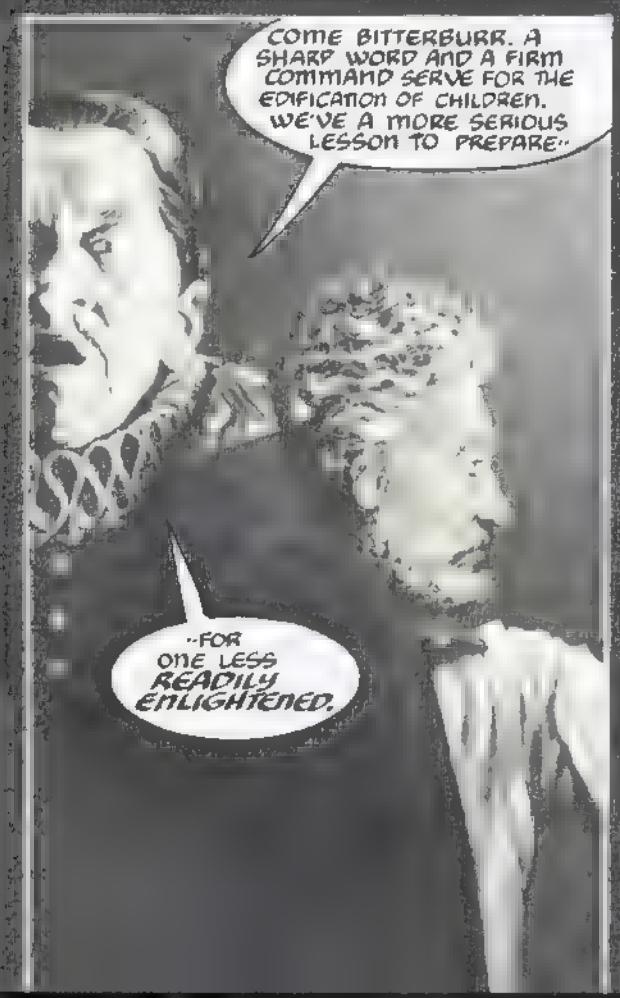
Most at court felt relief that their Lord was no longer lost to Abstract Study and Esoteric Exercise. But Bitterburr and I knew Waxwroth too well not to recognize a mere Shift in Focus of his growing Fanatic Ecstacy in his own sense of Personal Power.

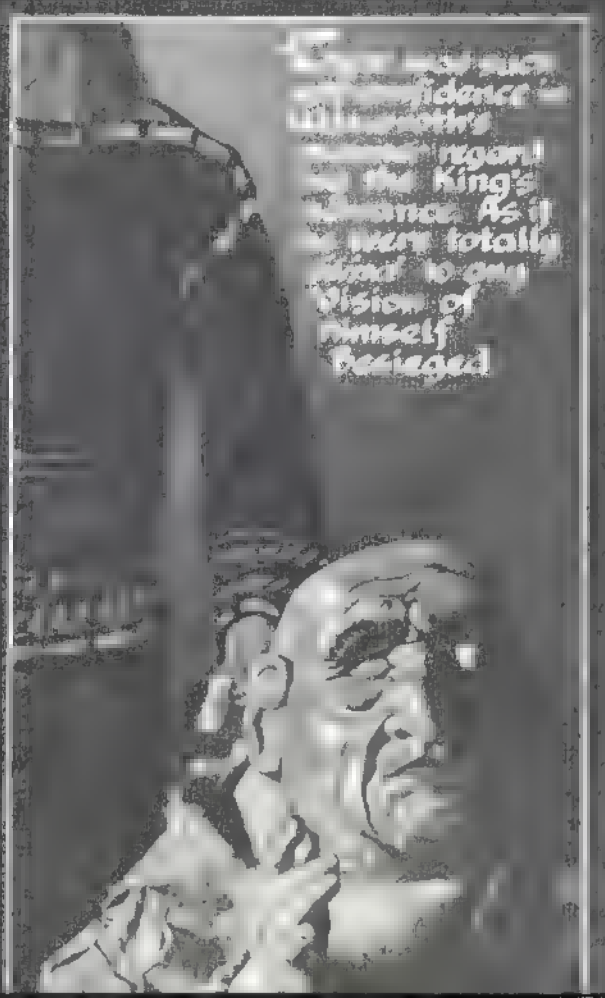
WHEN THIS VILLAIN IS UNMASKED, I MAY WELL THANK HIM... BEFORE I KILL HIM. THIS TRAITOR HAS TIPPED THE KING'S HAND... AND LED THE OLD FOOL UNWITTINGLY TO HIS OWN DESTRUCTION.

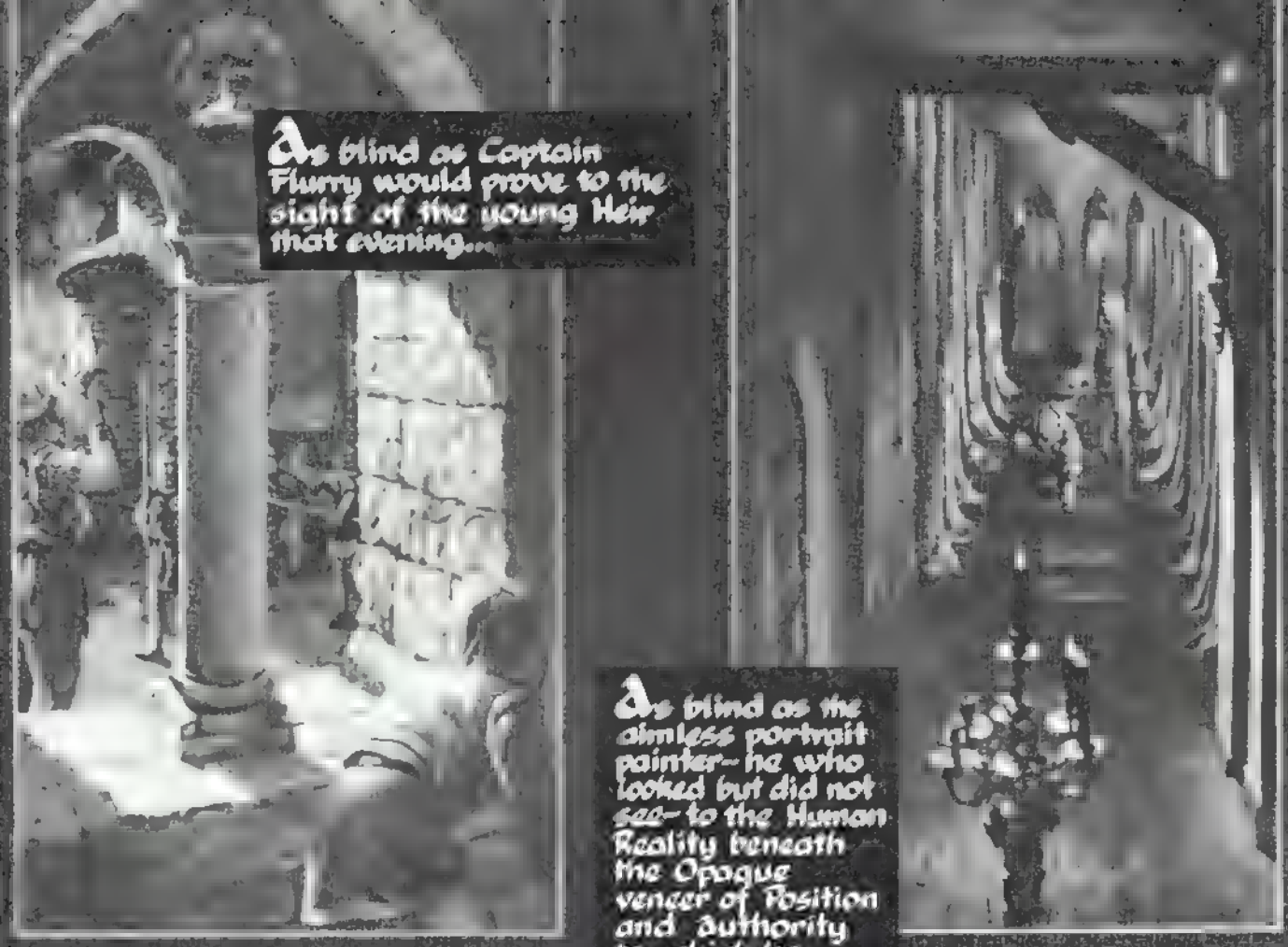

WITH AN ARMY? UNANNOUNCED? THIS IS THE RICHEST, MOST STRATEGIC PROVINCE IN ALL THE FIRST DOMINION. THE KING'S DESIGNS ARE BLATANT.
HAS HE NOT ALREADY MURDERED my FATHER?
WE HAVE NO CERTAIN EVIDENCE EVEN OF THE OLD LORD'S DEMISE, SIRE.
BE NOT SO GREAT A FOOL AS THE KING, COUNSELOR!
WE'VE NO WORD IN OVER THREE YEARS! ONLY DEATH COULD MAKE SUCH STILLNESS... AND NONE BUT THE KING WOULD'VE DARED KILL HIM! AND EVEN HE COULD NOT ACT OPENLY.. LEST EVERY OTHER PROVINCE RISE UP AGAINST HIM IN FEAR FOR THEIR OWN CONCERNS!
WELL, LET HIM COME! WE SHALL SMA-- WHO APPROACHES?
THAT HE COMES SO OPENLY NOW CONFIRMS THE KING HAS KNOWLEDGE OF OUR OWN SECRET STRENGTH. HE CAN JUSTIFY AN ATTACK TO THE COUNCIL OF PRINCES AS BEING IN ALL THEIR INTERESTS.

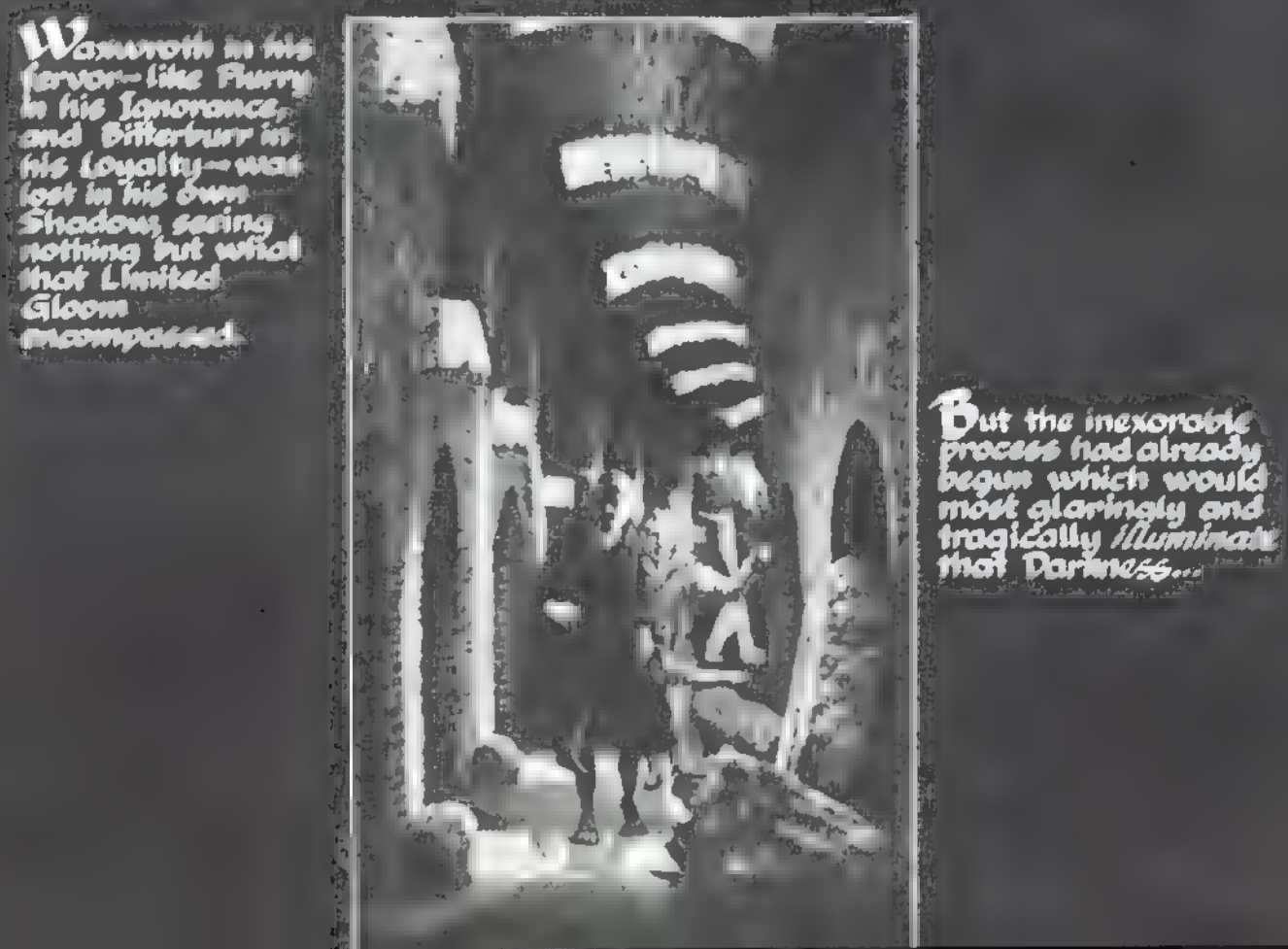
WHAT UNKEMPT KNAVE IS *THIS* WHO CONDUCTS HIMSELF AS EQUAL WITH YOUNG PRINCE RUPERT?
I REMAIN SHAMSHADOW, LORD. YOU COMMISSIONED ME TO RENDER, AS MY ABILITIES ALLOW *PORTRAITS* OF YOUR FAMILY AND YOURSELF.
HAVING COMPLETED THE FIRST THIRD OF MY CHARGE, I SEEK OPPORTUNITY TO CONTINUE.
AS HER LADYSHIP HAS REFUSED TO ACKNOWLEDGE MY ENTREATIES FOR AUDIENCE, I HOPE TO GAIN AN APPOINTMENT WITH YOUR HIGHNESS SO I MIGHT BEGIN ON THE *CENTERPIECE.*
MEANTIME, PRINCE RUPERT HAS DEVELOPED AN INTEREST IN THE DECORATIVE CRAFT. SWAYED BY HIS ENTHUSIASM, I NOW UNDERTAKE TO EDUCATE HIM IN THE ARTS.
TOADSWART SHALL ACCOMPANY YOU TO MY WIFES CHAMBERS WITH MY EXPLICIT COMMAND THAT SHE IMMEDIATELY ACCEDE TO YOUR REQUIREMENTS.
I SHALL NOT, HOWEVER, TOLERATE MY SON SQUANDERING HIS TIME AND EFFORT ON ANY SUCH TRIVIAL PURSUITS AS *YOU* MAY DEVISE.

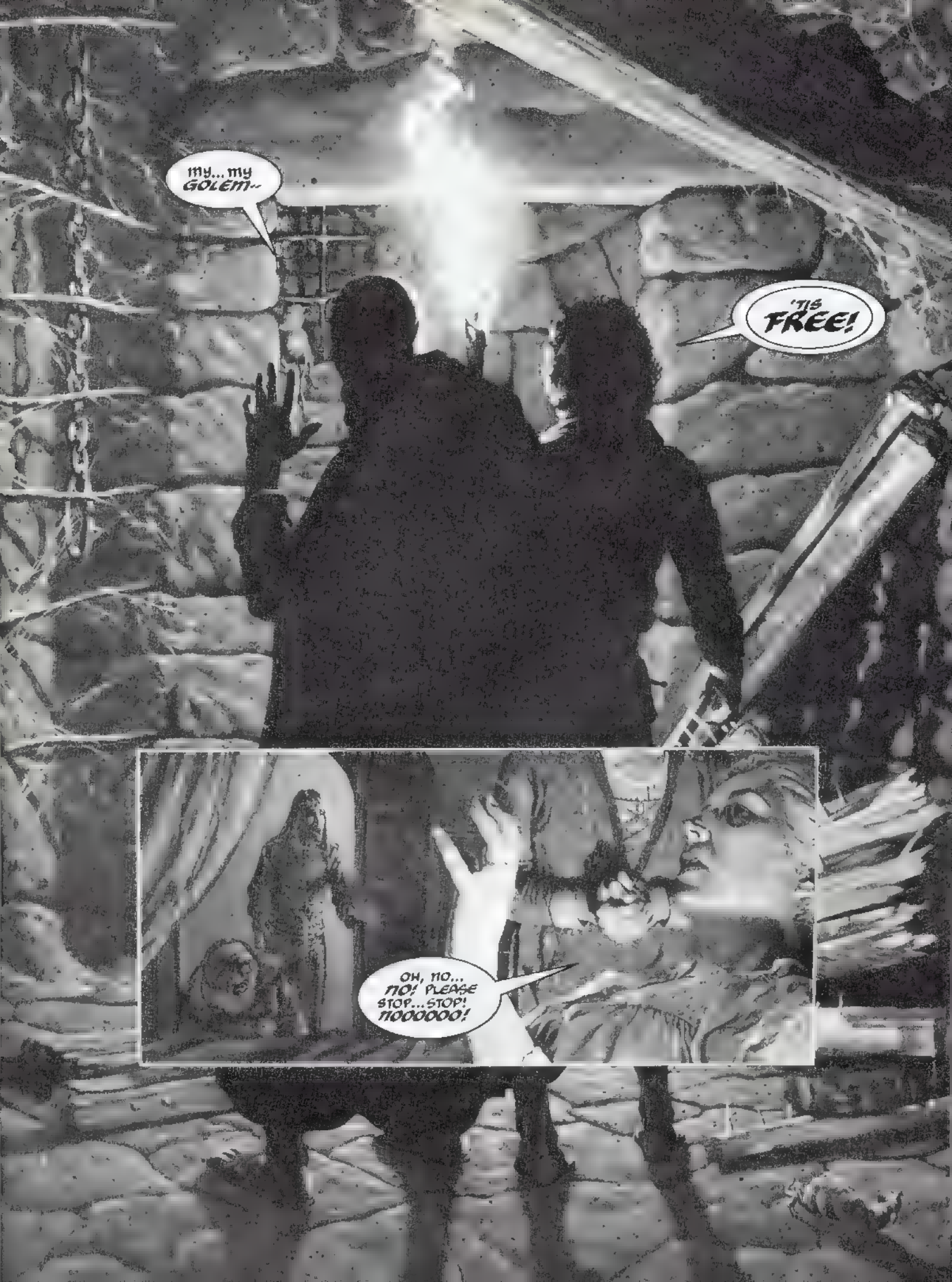

RUPERT WILL SOON BE HEIR TO ALL OF AMPLESTONE PROVINCE. HE MUST LEARN TO TO HOLD IT...AND FIGHT TO KEEP IT. AND HIS FIRST GREAT LESSON APPROACHES, SOON.
GO, BOY! PUT ARTIFICE ASIDE AND EMBRACE THE CRAFT OF LIFE! REPORT TO CAPTAIN FLURRY FOR THE MUSTER OF OUR TROOPS.
AH... INNOCENCE THWARTED, AS EVER, BY RESPONSIBILITIES.
Crestfallen and dejected, the young Prince turned away.
The artist's ambidder aside astonished me. Not for its content—to which my heart conceded—but for the longing stirred in my soul for my own lost youth, despite all its estrangement and pain.


COME BITTERBURR. A SHARP WORD AND A FIRM COMMAND SERVE FOR THE EDIFICATION OF CHILDREN. WE'VE A MORE SERIOUS LESSON TO PREPARE.
..FOR ONE LESS READILY ENLIGHTENED.


King's
vision of
himself
besieged

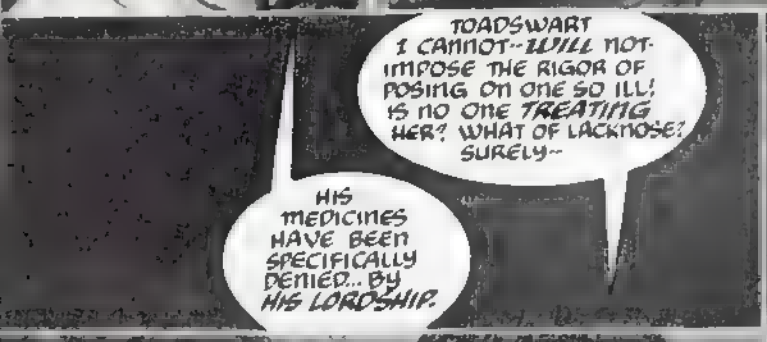

As blind as Captain Flurry would prove to the sight of the young Heir that evening...
As blind as the aimless portrait painter—he who looked but did not see—to the Human Reality beneath the Opaque veneer of Position and Authority to which he was thrall.

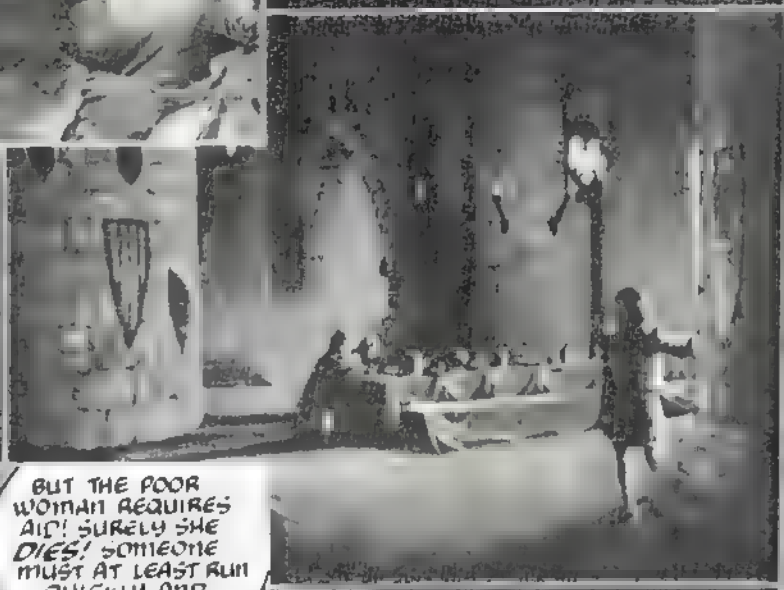

Waxmoth in his fervor—like Flurry in his Ignorance, and Bitterbury in his Loyalty—was lost in his own Shadow, seeing nothing but what that Limited Gloom encompassed.
But the inexorable process had already begun which would most glaringly and tragically *illuminate* that Darkness...


my... my GOLEM--
'TIS FREE!
OH, NO... NO! PLEASE STOP...STOP! NOOOOOO!

M'LADY...! PLEASE, I DO BUT--
IT'S NOT AGAINST YOU THAT SHE RAILS, PAINTER, BUT THE PHANTOMS OF HER FEVER WITH WHICH SHE HAS LONG BEEN STRICKEN.

At the same time I asked of myself: how long? Had affliction anything to do with the Esoteric motives and forces with which her husband toyed?


TOADSWART I CANNOT--WILL NOT-- IMPOSE THE RIGOR OF POSING ON ONE SO ILL! IS NO ONE TREATING HER? WHAT OF LACKNOSE? SURELY--
HIS MEDICINES HAVE BEEN SPECIFICALLY DENIED... BY HIS LORDSHIP.

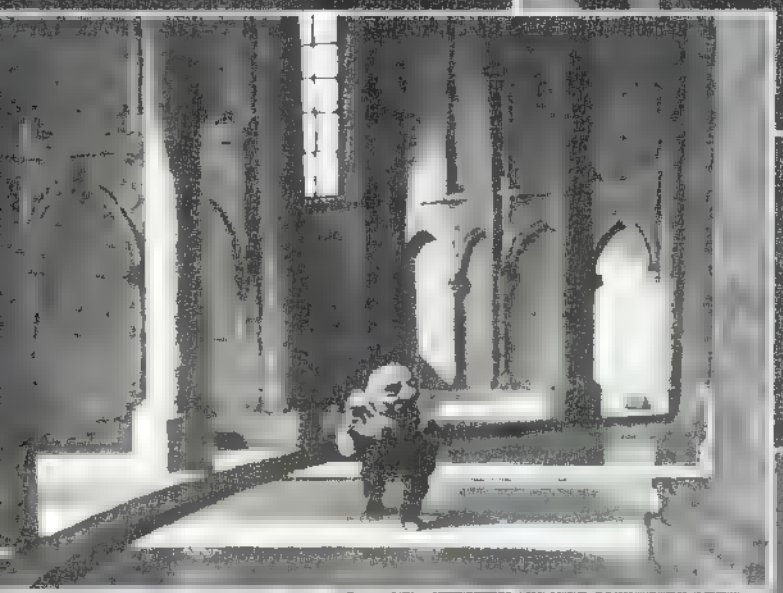


Princess Adriana had come to Amplestone thirteen years before from Bluewoode Province--herself hardly more than a child--to consummate the marriage and produce the offspring which would unite the two Provinces.

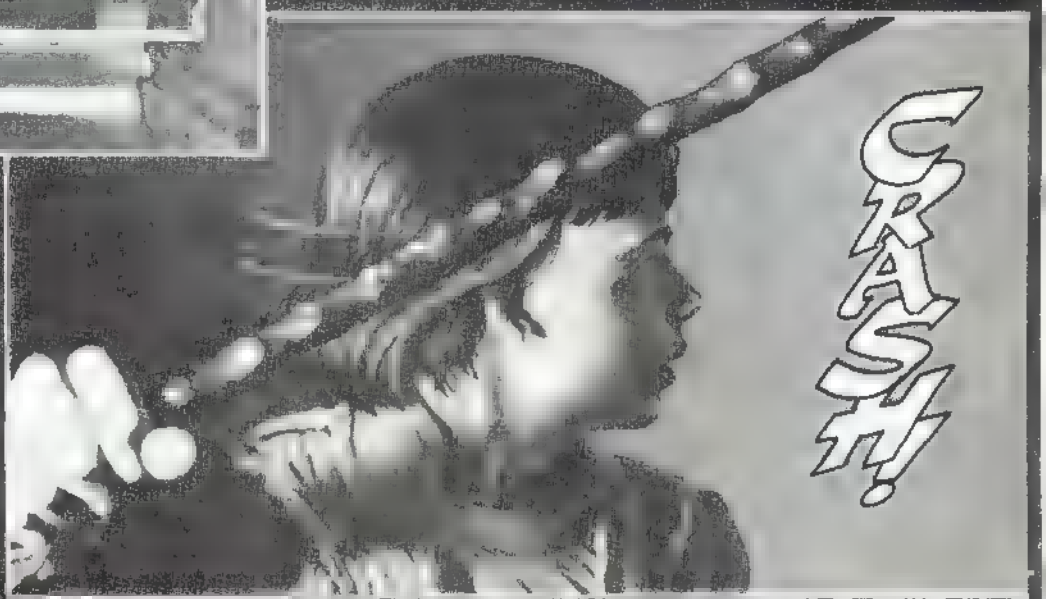
She had fulfilled--as she must--the Duties of Heritage. And she had seemed supremely happy with Motherhood. She had taken ill only as Prince Waxwroth became immersed in his Arcane Studies--and to bed almost immediately following his success with the Golem.

Before Waxwroth prohibited such Ministrations, the magician Lacknose had concocted some Soothing Potions, though he exhibited Small Confidence in their Efficacy, muttering and fretting about "Maladies of Spirit" and "Encroachment on Vital Forces."

As I hastened to the rectory, an Uncomfortable Unease settled upon me. For the first time I began to sense some Underlying Connection permeating events in Amplestone.



I but caught the faintest Glimmer— if not Understanding, at least a Perception— that what Waxwroth had fashioned somehow included and influenced us all.



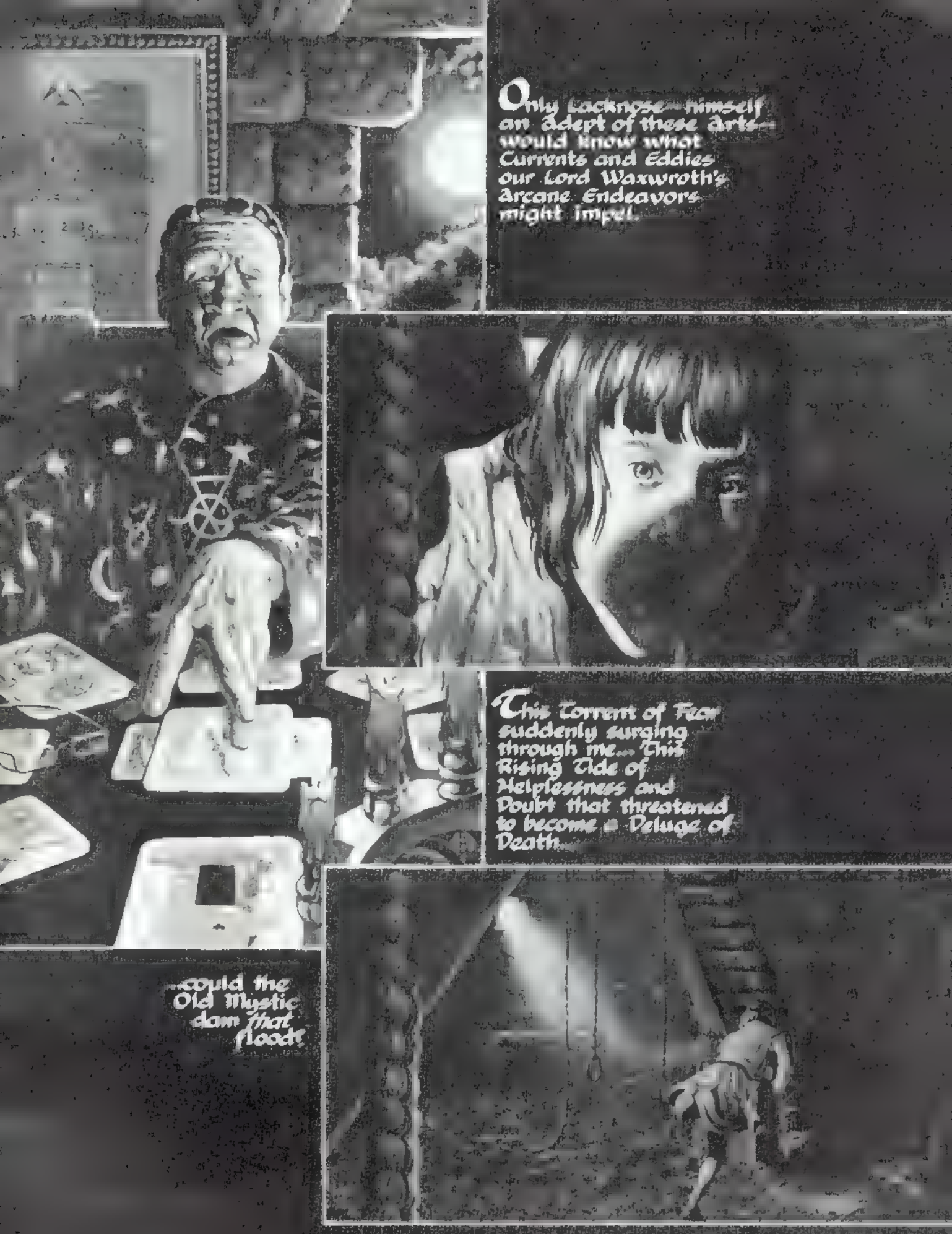
Thus my fear was born: Were the Vital Powers the Black Prince Forged and Wielded entirely his to command?

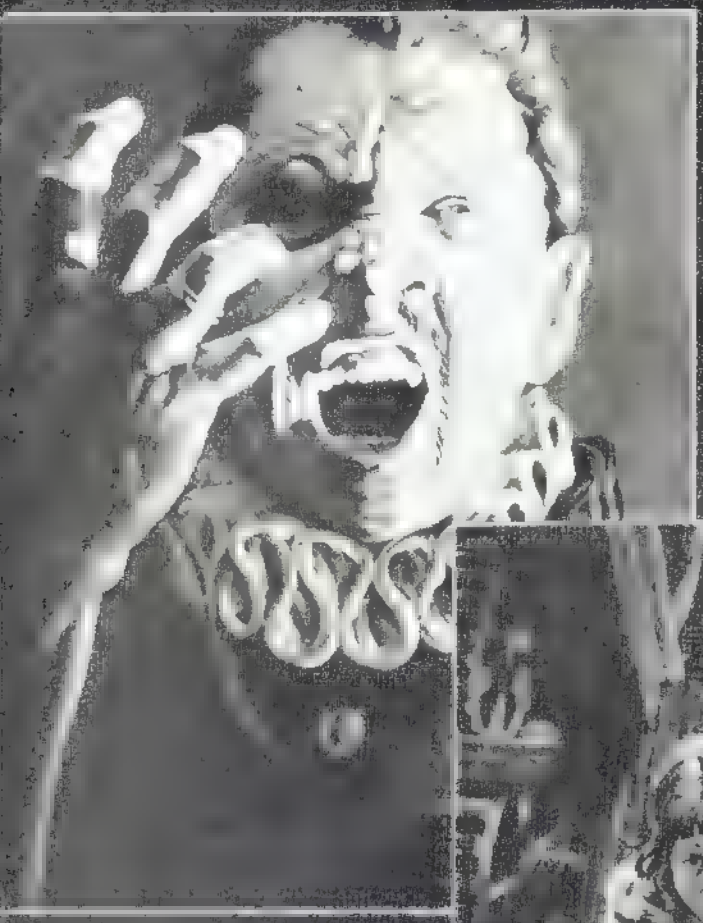
If those Forces existed beyond himself—as I was begining to suspect—while his Vision was yet confined to his Own Concerns, then he as well as all around him would be in Mortal Danger.

And if such travail should come, to whom could we turn for Succor?

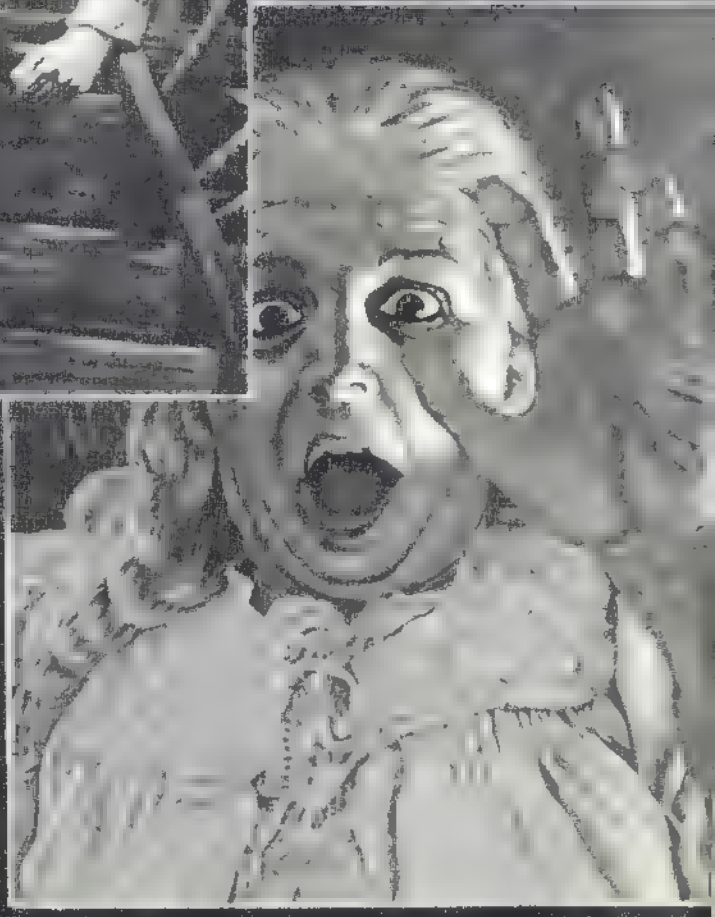
Surely not Father Pretense. He would see in these Perils the Hand of his Devil and Just Retribution for Sin, but have nothing to offer in Defense save Ritual and Dogma.

Bitterburr and Captain Flurry—even if they could reach beyond their loyalty to the Oak of Ampleforth—lacked, as did I, the requisite Understanding of the Situation and its Causes.


Only Lacknose—himself an Adept of these Arts—would know what Currents and Eddies our Lord Waxwroth's Arcane Endeavors might impel.
This Torrent of Fear suddenly surging through me... This Rising Tide of Helplessness and Doubt that threatened to become a Deluge of Death...
...could the Old Mystic dam that floods!



Even as the Priest and I quickened through corridor and courtyard, these anxieties engulfed and overwhelmed me. I was filled to bursting with Emotions and Notions not mine alone.



That first faint Glimmer of Dire Suspicion had become a blinding Light of Desperate Terror. In that Stark Illumination I briefly but clearly comprehended all of the Awful Wrath and Horror raging uncontrolled about us.

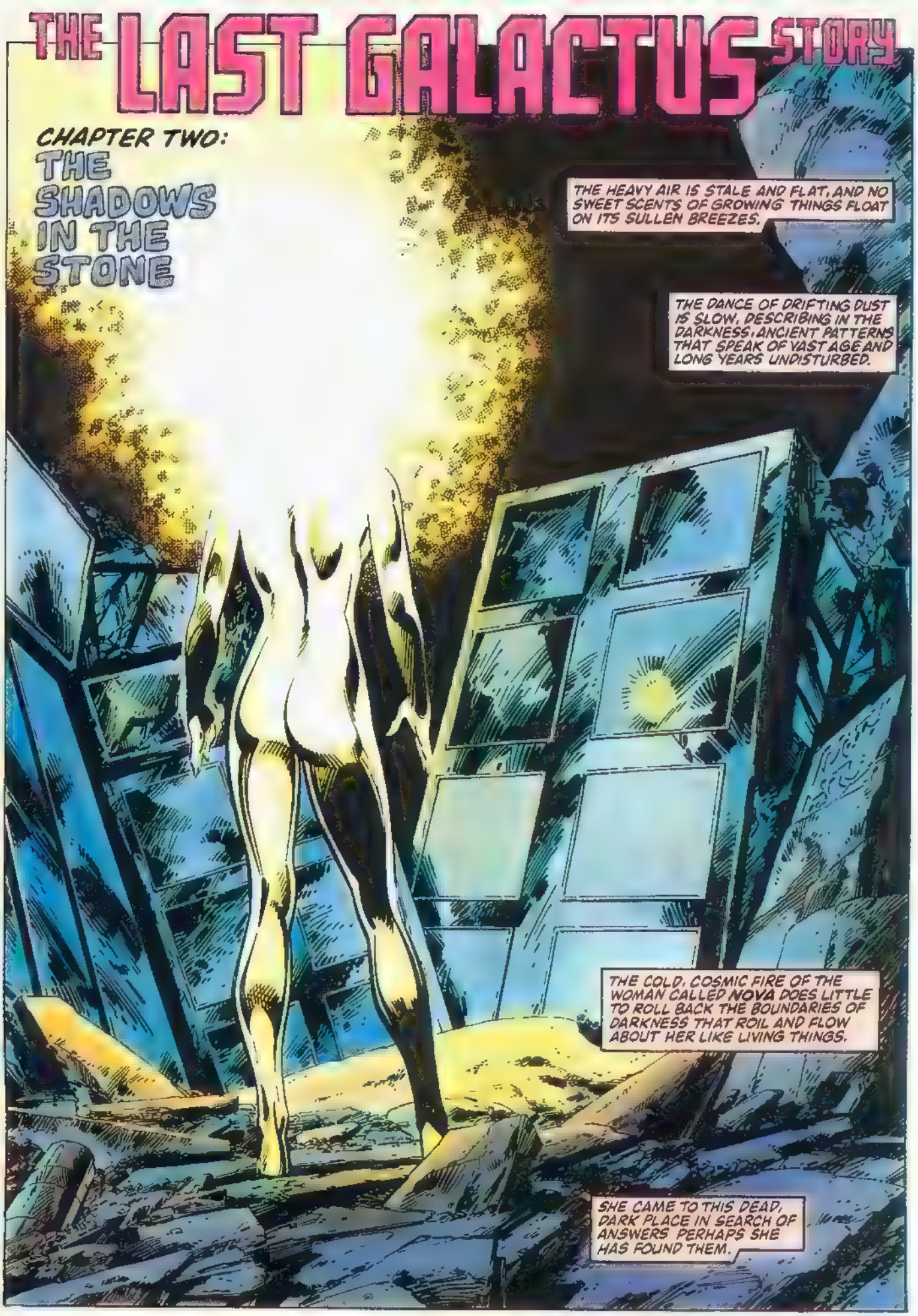
—when a trio of Disparate Screams—

...an Exclamation of Shock and Pain...
LOOK!
...a helpless, hurtling body...

next: ASHES TO ASHES

THE LAST GALACTUS STORY

CHAPTER TWO: THE SHADOWS IN THE STONE


THE HEAVY AIR IS STALE AND FLAT, AND NO SWEET SCENTS OF GROWING THINGS FLOAT ON ITS SULLEN BREEZES.
THE DANCE OF DRIFTING DUST IS SLOW, DESCRIBING IN THE DARKNESS, ANCIENT PATTERNS THAT SPEAK OF VAST AGE AND LONG YEARS UNDISTURBED.
THE COLD, COSMIC FIRE OF THE WOMAN CALLED NOVA DOES LITTLE TO ROLL BACK THE BOUNDARIES OF DARKNESS THAT ROIL AND FLOW ABOUT HER LIKE LIVING THINGS.
SHE CAME TO THIS DEAD, DARK PLACE IN SEARCH OF ANSWERS PERHAPS SHE HAS FOUND THEM.

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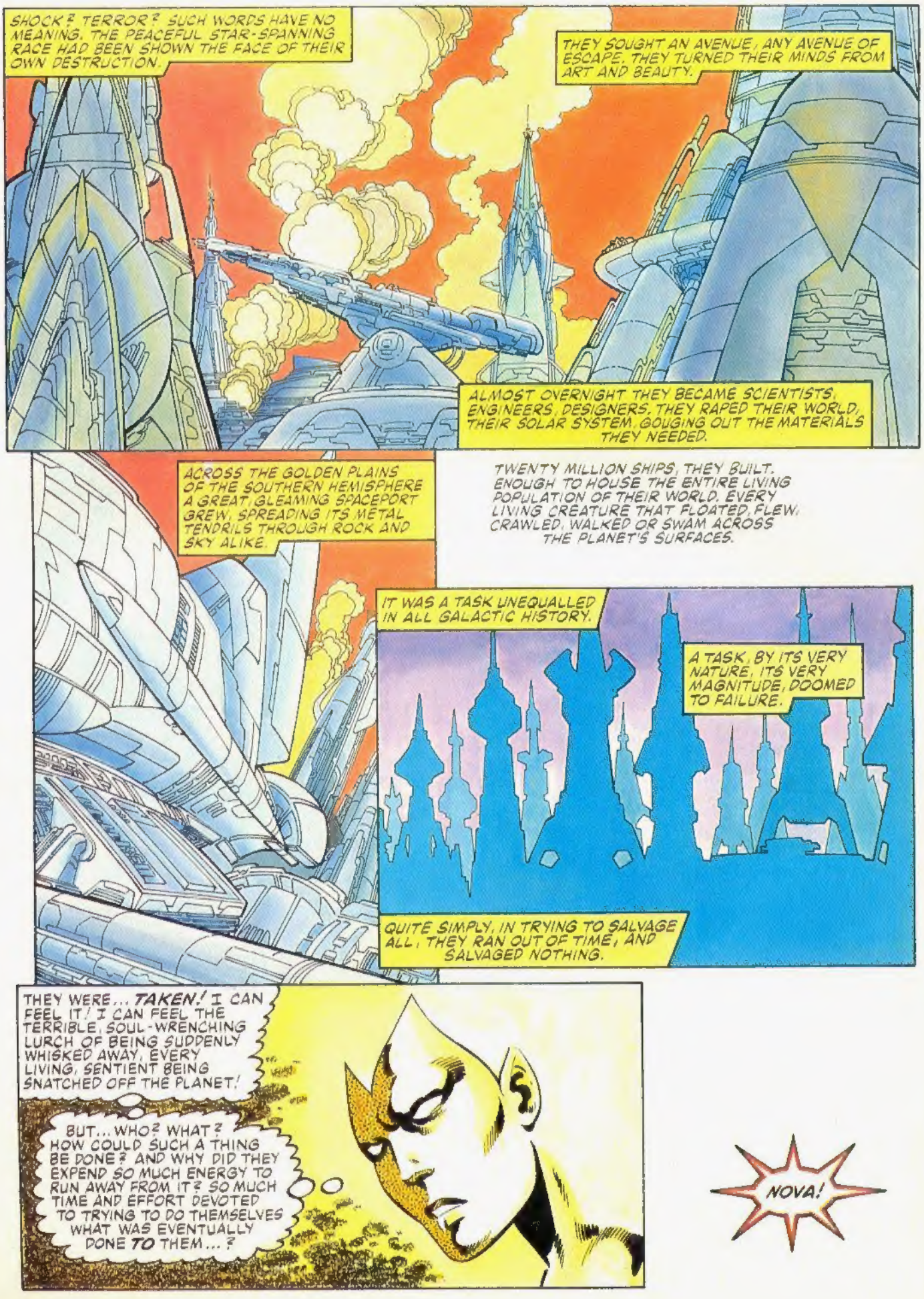
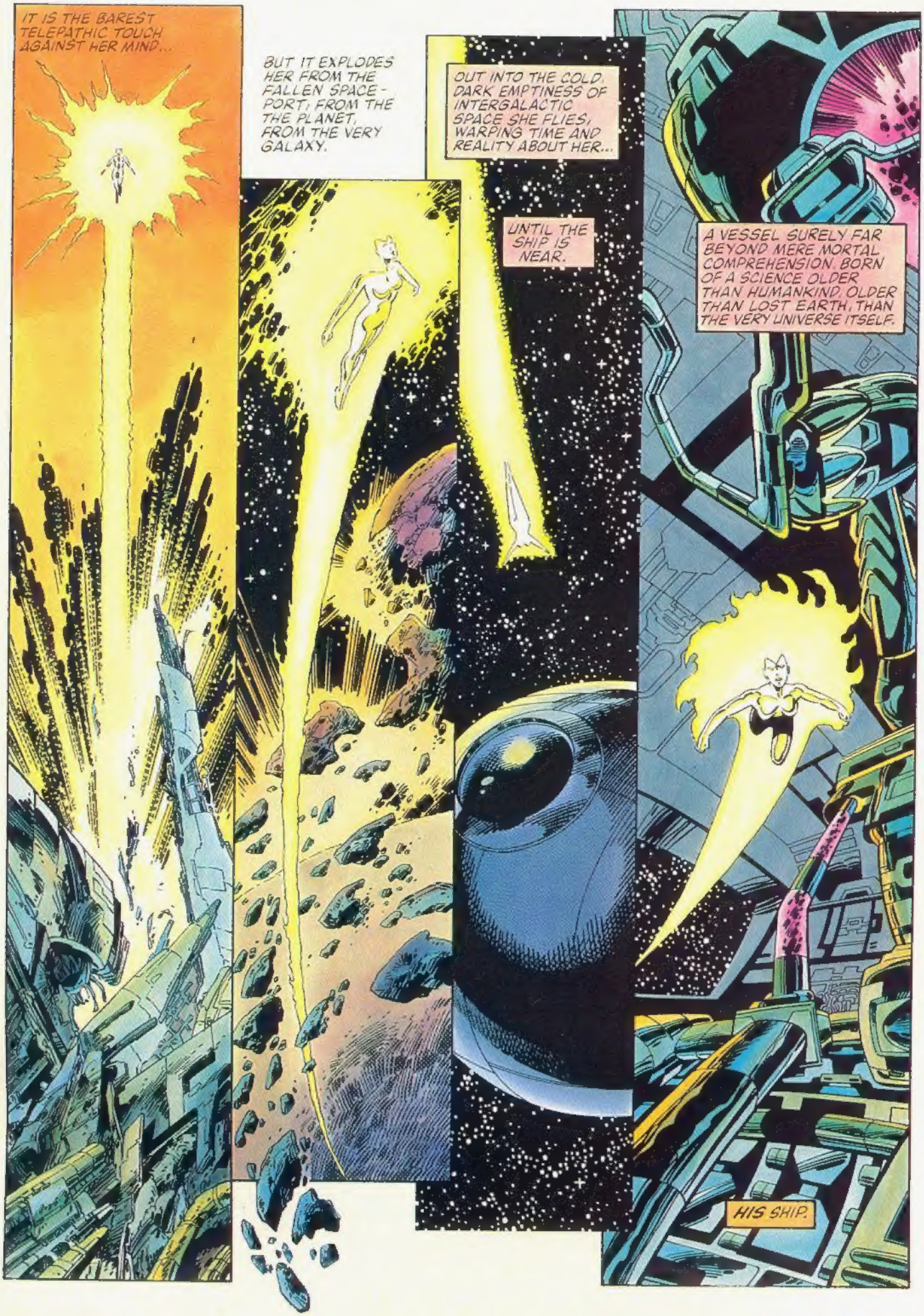
SPEAKER STONES OR SOMETHING VERY MUCH LIKE THEM! I'VE SEEN THEIR COUSINS ON A HUNDRED DISTANT WORLDS
BUT, NORMALLY THEY REPRESENT A DIFFERENT CULTURE. A VERY DIFFERENT CULTURE FROM THE ONE LYING IN RUINS OUTSIDE THIS HIDDEN CHAMBER.
THE SOCIETY AND TECHNOLOGY THAT CREATED ALL THOSE SPACE SHIPS OUT ON THE SURFACE WOULD SEEM UNLIKELY TO HAVE TAKEN THE TURNS NECESSARY TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUCH STONES.
THIS CHAMBER IS AT LEAST AS OLD AS THE OTHER ARTIFACTS I'VE SEEN THE DUST HAS BEEN GATHERING HERE FOR EONS
THAT MAY BE PART OF THE ANSWER WHOEVER SET THESE STONES EXPECTED IT TO BE A LONG TIME BEFORE THEY WERE SEEN AGAIN
THEY SELECTED SPEAKER-STONE TECHNOLOGY TO CARRY THEIR MESSAGE BECAUSE THE PSIONIC IMAGERY OF THE STONES FUNCTIONS AS A UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE.
GENTLE AS A MOTHER BRUSHING ERRANT STRANDS OF HAIR FROM THE BROW OF HER SLEEPING BABE NOVA'S GOLD SHEATHED FINGERS CARESS THE ANCIENT STONES
A MURMURRSES
LIKE THE GHOSTLY CHANTINGS OF LONG DEAD HOLY MEN, THE DISTANT BURBLE OF VOICES TICKLES AT HER SENSES, ALREADY HEIGHTENED FAR BEYOND THE PALTRY HUMAN LEVELS AT WHICH SHE FIRST PERCEIVED THE UNIVERSE, SO LONG AGO.
DEEP WITHIN THE STRANGE, TRANSLUCENT STONES SHADOWS BESTIR THEMSELVES...

SHADOWS THAT REACH OUT AND TOUCH HER MIND, TO UNFOLD IMAGES LIKE MEMORIES LONG FORGOTTEN.
NOT TRUE MEMORIES, THESE. FOR THEY BELONG TO A RACE LONG DEAD, A RACE NOT HUMAN.
A RACE WHOSE MOST REMOTE ANCESTORS HAD LEARNED TO UNLOCK THE PRISON OF THE BRAIN, AND SET FREE THE MIND.
OUT OF SUCH FREEDOM HAD GROWN A CULTURE OF PEACE AND ABSOLUTE HARMONY.
THEIR BODIES SAFELY TENDED TO BY THEIR AUTOMATED SYSTEMS ON THE HOMEWORLD THEY LET THEIR UNENCUMBERED MINDS DRIFT OUT...
...FIRST ACROSS THEIR PLANET, TILL EVERY HIDDEN NOOK AND CRANNY HAD BEEN EXPLORED...
...THEN THEY TURNED THEIR THOUGHTS AND PATHS OUTWARDS, AWAY FROM THE SAFE, SECURE SOIL OF HOME...
...OUT INTO THE BOUNDLESS BEYOND, THE GREAT UNKNOWN OF SPACE.
AND THERE, WITHIN THE DARK, SWIRLING NEBULAE OF THE GALACTIC CORE THEY FOUND THE TERRIBLE SECRET, HIDDEN FOR UNTOLD MILLENNIA...


SHOCK? TERROR? SUCH WORDS HAVE NO MEANING. THE PEACEFUL STAR-SPANNING RACE HAD BEEN SHOWN THE FACE OF THEIR OWN DESTRUCTION.
THEY SOUGHT AN AVENUE, ANY AVENUE OF ESCAPE. THEY TURNED THEIR MINDS FROM ART AND BEAUTY.
ALMOST OVERNIGHT THEY BECAME SCIENTISTS, ENGINEERS, DESIGNERS. THEY RAPED THEIR WORLD, THEIR SOLAR SYSTEM, GOUGING OUT THE MATERIALS THEY NEEDED.
ACROSS THE GOLDEN PLAINS OF THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE A GREAT, GLEAMING SPACEPORT GREW, SPREADING ITS METAL TENDRILS THROUGH ROCK AND SKY ALIKE.
TWENTY MILLION SHIPS, THEY BUILT. ENOUGH TO HOUSE THE ENTIRE LIVING POPULATION OF THEIR WORLD. EVERY LIVING CREATURE THAT FLOATED, FLEW, CRAWLED, WALKED OR SWAM ACROSS THE PLANET'S SURFACES.
IT WAS A TASK UNEQUALLED IN ALL GALACTIC HISTORY.
A TASK, BY ITS VERY NATURE, ITS VERY MAGNITUDE, DOOMED TO FAILURE.
QUITE SIMPLY, IN TRYING TO SALVAGE ALL, THEY RAN OUT OF TIME, AND SALVAGED NOTHING.
THEY WERE... TAKEN! I CAN FEEL IT! I CAN FEEL THE TERRIBLE, SOUL-WRENCHING LURCH OF BEING SUDDENLY WHISKED AWAY, EVERY LIVING, SENTIENT BEING SNATCHED OFF THE PLANET!
BUT... WHO? WHAT? HOW COULD SUCH A THING BE DONE? AND WHY DID THEY EXPEND SO MUCH ENERGY TO RUN AWAY FROM IT? SO MUCH TIME AND EFFORT DEVOTED TO TRYING TO DO THEMSELVES WHAT WAS EVENTUALLY DONE TO THEM...?
NOVA!


IT IS THE BAREST TELEPATHIC TOUCH AGAINST HER MIND...
BUT IT EXPLODES HER FROM THE FALLEN SPACE-PORT; FROM THE THE PLANET, FROM THE VERY GALAXY.
OUT INTO THE COLD, DARK EMPTINESS OF INTERGALACTIC SPACE SHE FLIES, WARPING TIME AND REALITY ABOUT HER...
UNTIL THE SHIP IS NEAR.
A VESSEL SURELY FAR BEYOND MERE MORTAL COMPREHENSION. BORN OF A SCIENCE OLDER THAN HUMANKIND, OLDER THAN LOST EARTH, THAN THE VERY UNIVERSE ITSELF.
HIS SHIP.

AND HE IS GALACTUS.
DEVOURER OF WORLDS! HARBINGER OF ULTIMATE DOOM! HIS MANLIKE FORM IS ONLY IN HER EYES.
FOR HIS TRUE SHAPE IS UNGUESSED AND UNGUESSABLE. HE IS A LIVING FORCE OF NATURE.
NOVA IS HERE, O MASTER. I HAVE HEARD YOUR CALL AND STAND READY TO DO YOUR BIDDING.
THEN HEED WELL MY WORDS, MOST LOYAL OF MY HERALDS.
THE SHATTERED GALAXY FROM WHICH YOU HAVE RETURNED IS NOT UNIQUE! THE LONG RANGE SCANNERS WITHIN THIS SHIP DETECT A VAST PROCESSION OF SUCH DESTRUCTION, REACHING HALFWAY ACROSS THE UNIVERSE.
IT BEGINS QUITE NEAR THE POINT OF UNIVERSAL ORIGIN, AND ENDS AT YOUR LONG SINCE DEPARTED FORMER HOME.
THE GALAXY MEN ONCE CALLED THE MILKY WAY!

THE LAST GALACTUS STORY CONTINUES NEXT ISSUE